MOTHER DURGA

AN ICON OF

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

ABHIJIT DUTTA

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Dedication

The book is dedicated to the memory of my teacher, the late Amalesh Tripathy, Ashutosh Professor of Medieval and Modern Indian History, University of Calcutta.

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Preface

This work was completed by me in the capacity of UGC Research Scientist (B), attached to the Department of History, Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

The work, mainly concentrates on the first half of the twentieth century, particularly the forties, including such themes as the freedom struggle, communalism, the Bengal Famine of 1943, the Puja scenario after Independence, and the impact of the Second World War on the Durga Puja in Calcutta and its suburbs.

Hindu-Muslim antagonism over immersion of Durga images during the pre-partition-days has been vividly sketched in the study, along with the endeavours of leading political and social personalities and forums after partition, both in West Bengal and East Pakistan, to stem the tide of communal ill-feeling during the Puja-Id week in October, 1947. This has been painstakingly furnished mainly from the files of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. The miserable plight of Bengal's teeming millions particularly during the Bengal Famine of 1943 has been depicted in vivid colours from the contemporary Bengali daily, the Ananda Bazar Patrika. Besides, an entire sub-section is devoted to the Vijaya Dashami marking the end of Durgotsav. The relevance of Vijaya in the context of political as well as the socio-economic upheavals of the time has been portrayed in details from a careful perusal of contemporary source materials gleaned mainly from the files of the Amrita Bazar Patrika.

Although the area of study concentrates on the first half of the 20th century, the contents of the book hark back to

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earlier times in order to make the reader well conversant with the history of Durga Puja festival in Calcutta and the mofussil in the earlier centuries.

Of special interest is the transformation of household Durga Pujas of the wealthy to community worship enshrined in the Baroari or Sarbajanin Pujas.

The first part of the book dealing principally with the spiritual basis of Durga worship, concentrates on the spiritual, metaphysical, psychological, and symbolical aspects of Goddess Durga and Her demon antagonist, Mahisasura. The social, religious, and symbolical connotations attached to Devi Durga's companions, viz., Laxmi, Saraswati, Kartick, and Ganesha have also been probed, together with the astrological implications of Her conveyors to the Earth. The ethical side of Durga Puja along with its social significance have been covered in great details to illustrate the true ambience in which it is held. The temporary change in the Hindu mentality during the four days of the festival has also been explored to bring out the spirit of mirth and gaiety on this auspicious occasion. Also highlighted in a subsequent part of the book, are the un-orthodox reflections of Rabindranath Tagore on Durgotsav in Bengal.

Parts of the book dealing with the historical and social perspectives contain sections already highlighted earlier in this Preface. Of special interest in these parts are the names and locations of as many household or community Durga Pujas in Calcutta and the suburbs as I could muster.

One regrettable thing that marred the collection of research data on the subject in the period under consideration lay in the paucity of materials. The reason as to why I had to depend mainly on secondary sources for information from 1900 to 1937 was principally because of

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the unavailability of primary source materials of the period. Books were either misplaced or too brittle for consultation, while newspapers during this time were mostly in such a state of decay that they could not be handed over to me for consultation by the authorities in charge of them.

Nonetheless, I owe a debt of gratitude to the staff of numerous libraries of Calcutta for the more or less successful prosecution of my work. These were mainly those of the Naitonal Library, Kolkata, particularly the National Library Newspaper Reading Room at Esplanade East, Kolkata, those of the Central Libraries of Calcutta and Jadavpur University, the employees of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, and those of the Asiatic Society in the city.

Prof. Chittabrata Palit, Professor of History, Jadavpur University and Director, Corpus Research Institute, alongwith Dr. Ujjal Ray, Reader in History, Sonarpur College, South 24 Parganas, provided me with great inspiration in writing this book. Thanks are due to the Registrar, Jadavpur University and the Finance Officer, Jadavpur University, for permitting me to get funds for publication, quickly from my contingency account.

I also express my debt of gratitudes to Mr. Aloke Krishna Deb of the Shovabazar Deb Rajbati for providing me with a valuable photograph of the Durga image which graced the Puja podium at the Rajbati premises during Sarodotsav, 1930. He also furnished me with another photograph of the Fair that was held in 1936, adjoining the Durgotsav at the Rajbati premises.

Thanks are also due to Shree Probal RoyChaudhuri of the Barisha Saborno RoyChaudhuri family for allowing me to use a photograph of Durga which was incidentally worshipped at the ancestral premises of the Saborno

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RoyChaudhuris at Barisha, during Durgotsav in 1920. The same to the Indian Museum authorities at Calcutta for photographs.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Biman Dasgupta for printing, in computer, photographs of the early images of Durga which I had so far collected, among which were two photographs of Durga taken from the Ananda Bazar Patrika, Saradiya numbers of 1935 & 1936 respectively.

I cannot forget the help and encouragement rendered to me during the progress of my work by my friend Mr. Debasish Adhikary & my young Research Scholar, Kaushik Ananda Bahubalindra.

My wife, Bharati, was also a stupendous source of inspiration while my son, Promit, provided comic relief during moments of stress and strain while the work was in progress.

Lastly, thanks are due to Messrs Readers Service for taking the responsibility of publishing the manuscript. The same to Mr. Sushil Kumar Das for expert proof reading and for the preparation of the Index of the book.

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THE DURGA PUJA

(CALCUTTA AND ENVIRONS 1900-1947)

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Part–I

The Spiritual Basis

Durga Puja in Bengal, and its counterparts, Dussehra and Navaratri in other parts of India, signify "*the universal resurgence of the power of creation over destruction.*"[1] Although it is often conjectured that this Puja began in Bengal in the 12th century[2], the earliest available authentic data for its commencement in the province goes back to the time of Akbar, whose chief collaborator, Raja Kanshanarayan of Tahirpur in the Rajshahi district of East Bengal, set the ball rolling by organising Durga Puja celebrations in autumn. Kanshanarayan had actively assisted Emperor Akbar to bring about the collapse of Pathan rule in Bengal and to draw the province under Mughal sway. He had an eye to the post of Mughal Subedar of the state which also comprised Bihar and parts of Orissa. However, his hopes were belied when despite his help to Akbar, the latter declined to choose him for the post. This led the Tahirpur Lord to repent his earlier action in collaborating with Akbar in causing the demise of Pathan rule. The best form of penance, according to the advice of his family priest (Kula Purohit) Rakesh Sastri, was by celebrating the worship of Devi Durga in autumn. This Puja was duly performed by Kanshanarayan with much fanfare and ostentation. The Tahirpur zamindar spent on the occasion no less than Rupees eight and a half lakhs. The ceremony organised by Raja Kanshanarayan gave rise to the yearly custom of holding autumnal (Sharadiya) Durgotsav in Bengal.[3]

Of course, the concept of Durga dates back to the Vedic era. The Puranas, contain references to the Goddess, among whom the most pre-eminent were the Brahmavaivarta Puran, Skanda Puran, Devi Puran, Markandya Mahapuran, Kalika Puran, Padma Puran, Matsya Puran and Chandi.[4]

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The Brahmavaivarta Puran mentions Devi Durga as Durgotinashini or the remover of multiple odious ills of humankind.[5] The Devi Puran also harps on an identical note[6], while in the Skanda Puran the Devi Herself dwells on Her popularity at having slain an invincible demon named Durgo for which act She was called Durga. The Goddess here expressly states that those who invoked or worshipped Her would be spared all ordeals in life.[7]

The Markandya Puran depicts the Goddess as omnipotent, unconquerable, and possessing all other qualities of a divine nature.[8]

The Kalika Puran hints at the vegetative potential of Durga by endowing Her with the name of 'Prithvidevi', or 'Goddess of the Earth'. What does Mother Earth, in the shape of Devi Durga, give, or is supposed to give? It is obviously first and foremost vegetative wealth denoted by cultivation of Mother Earth. And, there is ample proof to substantiate the proposition that from ancient times the cult of the Goddess was associated with agriculture. The worship of Nava Patrika or nine plants during Durga Puja celebrations speak volumes for this theory. Moreover, the names 'Annapurna' and 'Sakambhari' attributed to the Goddess justify the contention that She was none other than Prithvi Mata or Mother Earth.[9]

Goddess Durga is endowed with multiple forms. Again She is one with some deities of the Hindu pantheon. Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan has beautifully illustrated this aspect of the Mother Goddess in his Bengali article '*Devi Durga*', published in the autumnal number of the eminent Bengali journal Basumati (*B.S. 1369, viz., 1962 A.D.*). Vidyabhusan refers to Hindu religious text Sri Sri Chandi which depicts the Goddess as the bower of strength and creative power (*Saktirupini*) and as one with Lord Brahma. Durga is also portrayed as the consort of Lord Shiva, and also as Uma the daughter of Giriraj Himalaya and his wife

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Menoka. She is also called Chamunda, Koushiki, Shivaduti and Parvati. The Sri Sri Chandi enumerates the death of vicious demons, Madhukaitava, Shumba-Nishumba and Mahisasura at Her hands. However, She assumes different forms while slaying these demons. Thus, while She slays Mahisasura in Her form as Mother Durga, She assumes the form of Mahakali while slaying Madhukaitava, and that of Kaushiki while slaying Shumba-Nishumba.

There are two distinct seasons when Durga Puja may be performed in Bengal, viz., at autumn after the termination of the rainy season, and also after winter or the onset of spring. The first Puja is celebrated in the Bengali month of Aswin, while the second is held in the Bengali month of Chaitra. However, the autumnal worship of the Goddess has so much influenced the minds of the Bengali people, that this season is marked as the season of Durga Puja, while the spring festival comes in the form of the worship of the deity in the manifestation of Basanti Devi and Her Puja is known as Basanti Puja. Both the Pujas are relevant for our study when we trace the epical allusion to them. The epic in question is Ramayana and the principal focus of our discussion are two antagonistic forces, Ravana and Rama.

According to Bairagya Chakravarti :—

"In the legendary history of the Durga Puja, King Surath and Samadhi Vaishya are recognised as the first worshippers of the Goddess, but that was not the autumnal Puja. The worship of 'Basanti Durga' in spring by King Ravana of Sri Lanka, was esteemed as the true Durga Puja."[10]

Chakravarti, however, does not cite the Markandya Puran and Sri Sri Chandi which clearly state that King Surath and Samadhi Vaishya worshipped the Goddess in autumn. However, the Brahmavaivarta Puran clearly adduces the invocation of Durga by these two legendary figures in spring.[11] Thus, a clear difference of opinion exists on this point. As for the scriptural bearing of

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Lord Rama's conflict with King Ravana it must be noted that the latter was a worshipper of Durga but performed Her worship in spring. The Goddess, well appeased with the worship of the demon King of Lanka, granted him multiple boons. When, Sita, Rama's wife, was abducted by Ravana, Rama was forced on an expedition against the demon King. Rama, however, knew of Goddess Durga's boons to Ravana and correctly visualised that until and unless he could propitiate Her, victory against his adversary would be impossible. Hence, he made elaborate preparations for the worship of Durga. The time was autumn and the worship of the Devi at that season was unusual as the Goddess was worshipped in spring. Autumn was the time when Goddess Durga was fast asleep and had to be awaken to receive Ramachandra's prayers. This awakening of the deity at an *unusual time or (Akal)* gave rise to the concept of Akal Bodhan, viz., untimely prayer. Dakshinayana—i.e., six months from Asad (July) to Pausha (January) is considered as night of the gods when they fall asleep. So the 'Awakening' (or Bodhan) ceremony is necessary for worship in autumn. And for this reason, Ramchandra's Puja which was held in autumn was called AKALAPUJA (i.e., Worship of Devi Durga at an improper season). This untimely worship of Devi Durga by Lord Rama was thus termed *'Akal Bodhan'* or 'untimely worship' of the deity. The story of the Akal Bodhan of Durga by Ramachandra is referred to in the Kalika Puran and also in the Brihannadikashar Puran[12] both of which give a detailed narrative account of this worship. The worship was conducted on the advice of Lord Brahma, a front-ranking deity of the Hindu pantheon of gods.[13] When this worship reached its climax it was discovered that one out of the 108 lotus flowers offered to the Goddess was missing. Devi Durga had Herself stolen this single flower to test the devotion of Rama, so goes the version in the Puranas. Undaunted, Rama strove to make up for the missing flower by resolving to pluck out one of his eyes and offer it to

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the Goddess instead. As he was about to act thus, Devi Durga appeared before him, dissuaded him from the act, and granted him the boon of victory over Ravana who was till then considered to be invincible owing to a boon from the Goddess.[14]

The Akal-Bodhan ceremony of the Goddess precedes the autumnal worship of Durga in Bengal where the Puja is held at that season only, viz., in the Bengali month of Aswin i.e., September-October.[15]

The Sanskrit Ramayana of Valmiki does not mention Ramachandra's propitiation of Durga through the advice of Brahma. Valmiki-Ramayana dwells upon the invocation of the Sun-God or Surya by Rama to vanquish Ravana.[16] The theme of Rama's worship of the Goddess contained in the above-mentioned Puranas seems to have been popularised in many parts of Bengal by the Bengali poet Krittivas who, in his Bengali Ramayana, refers to the autumnal prayers of Lord Rama to Durga in order to defeat a virtually invincible Ravana.[17] Krittivas's views have been accepted as authentic by the great Bengali sage Raghunandan[18] and his followers whose influence on the religious life of the province caused the autumnal invocation of the Goddess to become a yearly routine affair. In an article in the Ananda Bazar Patrika, dated, B.S. 1354, (viz. 1947 A.D.)[19], an erudite Bengali scholar, Kshitimohan Sen, has shown how in areas of Bengal where Raghunandan's influence was not discernible, particularly in some parts of Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh), like Srihatta and Habibgunj, Durga Puja is celebrated through ghats (brass pans) or Navapatrika, a tradition imported from Mithila. Construction of images of the Goddess and worshipping the same found favour with the Kalika Puran or Brihannadikaswar Puran which were accepted wholeheartedly as the only correct form of worship of Durga by Raghunandan and his followers whose influence held sway over major areas of Bengal.[20]

In a literal sense, the conflict between Rama and Ravana may

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be characterised as the point of fusion between Aryan and Dravidian cultures, with Lord Rama representing the Aryan civilisation, and Ravana symbolising the more ancient Dravidian type. This confluence might have witnessed the transfer of some Dravidian religious traits to Aryan society, the most common being the worship of the Mother Goddess. Prior to this, the Aryans were worshippers of male gods like Indra, Agni, Vayu and Varuna along with Surya and others. This, again, explains why Valmiki stressed on the supplication of Surya by Rama in order to punish Ravana. In sharp contrast to the Aryan ethos, Dravidian society worshipped female deities. The confluence of the two cultures resulting from wars causing interactive fusion between the two societies finally led to worship of both male and female deities by the Aryans and the Dravidians. Thus while in addition to existing female Goddesses, the Dravidians came to worship male deities of the Aryans, the Aryans, on their part, came to worship purely Dravidian Goddesses in the shape of Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati etc. This feature which forms a moot-point of social and cultural integration in ancient India, has been illustrated remarkably, in Kshitimohan Sen's article.[21]

Amulyacharan Vidyabhusan, however, dwells on the autumnal Puja of Devi Ambika, an Aryan female deity in the Vedic times. This Devi Ambika, according to Vidyabhusan, is none other than Goddess Durga. According to him the term *'Ambika'* refers to autumn. Vidyabhusan draws proof from the ancient Vedic text Taittariya Brahman to show that Pujas dedicated to autumn were none other than the worship of Devi Ambika or Durga.[22]

Durga's encounter with demon Mahisasura for which the Goddess is renowned is discussed in detail in the Kalika Puran. This religious text describes in detail how the almighty Goddess ruthlessly pursued the demon in three different cycles of creation (Kalpa) and caused his destruction thrice in three mutually distinct incarnations of eighteen-armed Ugrachandi, sixteen-armed

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Bhadrakali, and ten-armed or Dasabhuja Durga. In Bengal She is worshipped in Her Dasabhuja form.

The legend of the Goddess in the Kalika Puran runs thus :—

In very ancient times, Lord Mahadeva was propitiated by a demon named Rambha to such an extent that the great God agreed to incarnate Himself as the son of the demon in three different births. In the first of these partial incarnations the Lord was born in the womb of a young she-buffalo with whom demon Rambha had united out of sheer lust. The offspring of such beastly passions had assumed the outward physical form of a buffalo and came to be known by the name of Mahisasura or Buffalo-Demon. Although born out of a part of Shiva's glory, Mahisasura had thoroughly imbibed all the vices of his natural parents. At that time one Randrashva, a disciple of a famous sage, Rishi Kattyayana, was engaged in severe penance in the Himalayan regions. The buffalo-demon went there and assuming the form of a pretty nymph led the innocent young ascetic astray. This outrageous act so much enraged Rishi Kattyayana that he cursed the demon to the effect that he would soon die in the hands of a female. Accordingly, the great Goddess manifested Herself as an eighteen-handed divine female form of vicious appearance and slew the demon. This was the first, i.e., *Ugrachandi incarnation* of the universal Mother Durga.

In the next cycle of creation (i.e., in the cycle just preceding the present one), the Goddess appeared as Bhadrakali, the second incarnation of Durga. Swayambhuva Manu was then in charge of the protection of the three worlds making up the whole universe *(Brahmandya)*. During the first *Treta Yug* (or *Silver Age*) of his reign-period, the buffalo-demon was born again in accordance with the boon given by Lord Shiva to demon Rambha. When his oppressions became almost unbearable, the Goddess appeared before him as the sixteen-armed Bhadrakali on the northern shore of the milky ocean named *Kshiroda*, and there She physically

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eliminated Mahisasura for the second time.

In his third birth, which took place in the current cycle, demon Mahisasura constructed an impregnable fortress on a hill and established his capital there. He was making preparations for conquering the three worlds, when one night he dreamt a very strange dream. In this dream he saw Devi Durga chopping off his head and sucking the life-blood oozing out from his severed throat. Mahisasura became extremely frightened at this ominous dream, and the very next day he invoked the mighty Goddess. Well pleased with his devotion Devi Durga appeared before him who belauded Her in various ways. He was prepared to die in Her hands, he said, but urged Her mightily to allow his humble self to be worshipped by folks after death along with Her, (viz., Durga), as one of Her followers. The Goddess, well pleased with the humble supplication of the demon, promised to grant his prayer. She assured him that in images constructed on Her the demon would be represented as being in touch with one of Her feet, and that he would get a due share of worship from Her devotees for posterity.

With these words, the Goddess unfolded before the demon's eyes the pictures of Her past two incarnations of Ugrachandi and Bhadrakali. The flashback vividly reminded Mahisasura of all the occurrences of his two previous births and finally convinced him of the inevitability of his impending doom. But still the indomitable demon did not abandon his project of conquering the three worlds.

The rest of the story is vividly depicted in the pages of the *Saptashati Chandi*. Mahisasura did actually conquer the three worlds. He drove out the gods from their respective divine offices and himself began to function as Sun-God, Wind-God, Rain-God, Fire-God, etc.

The wretched divinities led by their King Indra, complained of their plight to the famous Trinity of Hindu gods, made up of

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Lords Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar (i.e., Shiva). The trio shivered in anger at the acts of the invincible demon, and out of their collected essence of energy emanating from their respective persons, there emerged a divine female form who was none other than Devi Durga. This was the third incarnation of the great Goddess, now possessing ten arms for which the appellation *'Dasabhuja'* was attached to Her. In this new form the divine Mother slew the demon for the third time and restored peace and order in the universe.

It is stated in the *Puranas* that this third incarnation of Durga took place on the fourteenth day of the black lunar fortnight of Aswin. The formation process, however, continued for a week more and reached its perfection on the seventh day of the bright lunar fortnight (i.e., *on the Saptami Puja day*). The very next day, (i.e., *on the Ashtami Puja day*), She was decorated by the different divinities with different ornaments and weapons. In between the Astami or 8th Puja day and the ninth day (i.e., *on the Navami Puja day*), She was propitiated with various articles of worship, and being well pleased with the gods, killed demon Mahisasura.[23] This particular occasion marked the commencement of the Sandhi Puja in Bengal during autumnal Puja every year. According to Markandya Puran, the assumption of the militant or Ugrachandi posture by Durga in order to slay Mahisasura is the exact time of Sandhi Puja. Again Sandhi Puja marks the destruction of Ravana by Ramachandra signifying the triumph of good over evil. There was a fundamental dichotomy on the creation of the (ten armed) Goddess out of the collected essence of energy of Lords Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar to slay buffalo-demon Mahisasura, for the third and final time. If this theory of creation be taken as authentic then where lies the truth of her earlier incarnations as Ugrachandi and Bhadrakali? Authors like Asokenath Sastri[24], Chitralekha Singh[25] and Prem Nath[26], are quite vague on this point.

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According to Chitralekha Singh and Prem Nath :—

"The lion-mounted Durga is the warrior Goddess. Durga, fully armed, was created out of the breath of the most powerful gods of Hinduism. She has a beautiful feminine shape whose splendour over-spread the three worlds. Each deity contributed his best virtue and weapon to create and arm Her. Shiva's trident, Agni's first dart, Indra's thunderbolt, Varuna's conch-shell, Vishnu's discus, Vayu's bow, Kuber's club, Yama's iron rod, Vasuki's snake, Surya's shield and sword invested the Devi's ten arms. In this aspect, She is worshipped during Durga Puja. Devi proceeded to the Vindhyas and demolished Mahisasura, in spite of the latter battling Her in many guises."[27]

The above account reflecting only on the creation of the ten-armed Durga by the divine powers that be conflicts with the theory of Her past two incarnations. It would be prudent here to opine that the Goddess was already there from Her prior incarnations and that She appeared for the third time in the ten-armed form when She was invoked or summoned by the above deities to liquidate the buffalo-demon, Mahisasura. She was not newly created as a ten-armed deity by the defeated and humiliated gods, as is the impression advanced by many scholars.

The appearance of the ten-armed (viz., Dasabhuja) incarnation of the Goddess might have been the direct result of invocation by gods of the Hindu pantheon. But Her first incarnation as Ugrachandi or the 18-armed female deity was undoubtedly the result of creation brought about by gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. This theory may be adduced from the *Vamana-Purana*, which positively states that She was created by the Trinity (viz., Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) to save the lesser gods of the Hindu pantheon from the depredations of Mahisasura. Her beauty so much attracted the two commanders of Mahisasura, Chunda and Munda, that they reported the same to their Lord who sent feelers to the Goddess requesting Her to become his chief queen. The

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Goddess, however, was not totally insensitive to the proposal but assented that She had to be first won in battle. So Mahisasura fought with Her, and was vanquished and finally slain in the war.[28]

Durga is also known as Kattyayani. This is because Her Ugrachandi incarnation took place at the temple of sage Kattyayan in the Himalayas. According to the Hindu scripture, Sri Sri Chandi, the legend goes that, on a particular day when the sage was in deep meditation inside his temple, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar (viz., Shiva) appeared before him in great anger at the depredations of Mahisasura and at the plight of the lesser gods at his hands. Out of the bodies of the holy Trinity (viz., Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) emerged powers of great intensity which, combining together, gave rise to a beautiful eighteen-armed female deity, (viz., Ugrachandi or the first incarnation of Goddess Durga), who vanquished Mahisasura for the first time, thereby proclaiming the ultimate triumph of good over evil. As this incident occurred in the presence of sage Kattyayan and as he was the first to worship Her, Devi Durga came to be called *'Kattyayani'*[29]. The above anecdote is also incorporated in the *Kalika Puran*.[30]

Kattyayani Durga is worshipped in autumn on which season She was created in the sage's temple. Devi Durga worshipped in autumn, has earned the wide-spread appellation of *'Durgati Nashini'* or the flayer of ills that plague mankind. Why? What significance is attached to autumn vis-a-vis this point of view? The answers to the above queries may be got from the Vedic text *'Krishna Yagur Veda'*, where Sayanacharyya observes that in the Vedic era, an epidemic stalked autumnal season in Northern India causing mass-scale destruction of human lives. In order to get rid of this epidemic large-scale Yajnas or prayers were organised to appease Goddess Durga in the shape of Ambika. Again joint prayers to Shiva and Ambika were often performed

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through these Yajnas. However, Yajnas dedicated to Ambika only were more frequent than joint Yajnas to Shiva and Ambika, as people felt that the Goddess was the only one to whom Lord Shiva would listen to for ending the epidemic curse, from the face of the Earth. Thus, the Mother Goddess was supplicated and when the epidemic at last died out, it was attributed to the successful request made by the female deity to Lord Shiva or Rudra. Thus, Ambika or Durga has earned the title of *Durgati Nashini*. However, the correct time for conducting Yajnas in honour of Shiva (viz., *Rudra*) and Ambika (viz., *Durga*) was, by Vedic analogy, the season of spring. But as people generally invoked the Goddess (with or without Shiva) during autumn, to escape death through epidemic, which, incidentally, was an untimely period for such invocation, the worship of Durga during autumn is called Akal Bodhan or invocation at an unusual period of the year[31]. This forms another interpretation of Akal Bodhan in addition to the one cited already in this book.

The Skanda Puran furnishes another unique account of the origin of the name of 'Durga'. According to this Puran, Lord Kartikeya once informed sage Agastya of the existence of a demon named Durgama who through intense prayers to Lord Brahma obtained a boon from the God, by virtue of which he became virtually invulnerable. He conquered the three worlds, dethroned Indra, and expelled all other gods from heaven, compelling them to dwell in the forests. Banning all religious ceremonies on Earth, including the study of the Vedas by the Brahmins, he compelled the gods and Brahmins to sing to his praise. The terror evoked by Durgama caused rivers to change their course, fire to lose its energy, and stars to disappear from sight. Durgama assumed the shape of the clouds, showering rains at any time of the year that pleased him as a result of which the frightened Earth yielded abundant harvest, and trees flowered and bore fruit at off-seasons. The vanquished gods finally

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appealed to Lord Shiva for help against the demon. Shiva, in turn, requested his wife, Parvati, to destroy Durgama. Parvati created Kalaratri (Dark Night), a female form, whose beauty bewitched the inhabitants of the three worlds. Parvati thereupon ordered Kalaratri to request Durgama to restore things to their respective positions. This enraged the demon who despatched a huge army to arrest Kalaratri, but by Her heavy breath of power all the demon soldiers were reduced to ashes. Durgama thereupon despatched 30,000 demon soldiers, resembling huge monsters, who chased Kalaratri and she returned to Parvati. This prompted Shiva's consort to directly engage in war with Durgama. In this deadly conflict Durgama assumed multifarious forms, the principal ones among which were those of an elephant as big as a mountain and also that of a huge buffalo with very large horns. As Durgama possessed a thousand arms, Parvati too assumed the form of a warrior Goddess with a thousand arms. The army of the demon was totally vanquished in the fight while Durgama himself was slain by the prowess of the mighty Goddess. The Skanda Purana recounts how Parvati seized the demon, and setting Her left foot on his breast, pierced his mighty body with a spear thus killing him. The demise of Durgama so elated the gods hitherto expelled from the heavens by the demon King, that they sang in praise of Parvati. Since then She is recognised by the title of 'Durga', i.e., as the killer of the demon named Durgama.[32]

Since nine days and nine nights elapsed for the total formation of the Goddess in Her third incarnation into a warrior deity, the autumnal festival held in Her honour every year is called Nava Ratri (viz., nine nights) in various parts of India other than in Bengal where the celebration is characterised simply as Durga Puja for 3 days. The day following victory of the Goddess over Mahisasura and that of Ramachandra over Ravana is called Vijaya Dasami and Dussera respectively. While the former is held in Bengal, the latter finds sway in other parts of India. Both Vijaya

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Dasami and Dussera create a conviction that evil has been vanquished and that a benevolent deity known as Trinayani Durga (viz. three-eyed Durga) smiles upon the world.[33]

Tradition has it that Ramachandra was the first person to observe the Vijaya Dasami to celebrate his victory over Ravana, and the Kshatriya kings of India have since followed up this practice to perpetuate the memory of that fateful event which "represented the triumph of righteousness and justice over the dark forces of evil."[34] On this auspicious day, Hindu monarchs, aspiring after conquest of other kingdoms in order to set up an all-India Empire, started on their warlike ventures being sure of success.[35]

Of course, among those worshipping Durga as the embodiment of *Shakti* (viz., creative or cosmic energy) the significance of Vijaya Dasami lies elsewhere. For these people, Vijaya denotes the conquest by the spirit of the physical plain of consciousness and of the establishment on the Earth of rule divine.[36] While ordinary ascetics endeavour to escape from life and its suffering through intense meditation leading to an all-pervasive *Nirvana*, the Shakti worshippers laboured in the opposite direction and strove to bring down the divine energy of the Goddess to the physical plain and to transform and divinise human life on Earth.

> "Not an escape from earthly life in the ecstacies of trance" reflects the noted editor of Amrita Bazar Patrika, "but a transformation of divine energy to the physical plain was for the Shakti worshipper the aim of spiritual culture."[37]

This brings us to the cult of Shakti worship and the connection of Devi Durga with it. Goddess Durga is Shakti viz., creative energy, which represents a cosmic power or force. However, in Her womb both creative and destructive faculties lie.[38]

Shakti is also known as Jaganmata or the Progenitress of the universe. By virtue of Her self-pervading power Durga is simultaneously the producer and the produced. She is the Creator

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as well as the Destructor, as there is no creation without destruction. The old form perishes giving rise to a new form although the substance remains the same. The work of making and breaking which forms the quintessential characteristic of all life in the universe goes on incessantly for infinite space and time. Thus, Durga is called the 'Mother of the Universe' or 'Universal Mother'.[39]

Chaos and cosmos are mere modifications of matter. Goddess Durga as Nature is as much the Virgin daughter as She is the progenitress of the universe. Thus, She is simultaneously the *Mother* and the *Maid*—the Prakriti *(Producer)* and the Adya Shakti (viz., *Primordial Energy*).

As an all-pervasive and all-powerful cosmic force Durga is often addressed as the *Goddess of Infinite Space*.[40] In this form She is addressed by various names, viz., Purani, Parashakti, Rajrajeswari, Mulaprakriti (Primordial Energy) and so on.[41] In the *'Devi Mahatmya'*, it has been asserted that She covered all parts of the compass and that She was co-extensive with infinite space. Lest there be any misconception about Her, having regard to the description concerning Her as enveloping ten or eighteen points of the compass, She has been described as "thousand armed", suggesting that She over-spread every possible point of the compass.[42] The second and fourth chapters of the *Chandi* depict Her as the all-pervasive deity whose being encompasses the three worlds.[43] Again, the fifth chapter of the same text characterises Her as the *'Goddess of Extension' (S.1.77)*, leaving no doubt that She is the Goddess representing infinite space.[44]

"Durga, as the deity of infinite space has no parallel conception elsewhere in human history. It is not for nothing, therefore, that this fundamental awe-inspiring conception of this deity should be worshipped by people who understood its worth," remarks J.K. Sen in a brilliant article in the October 21st, 1947 issue of Amrita Bazar Patrika.

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Again, as Kali, Goddess Durga is the embodiment of Time. In Hindu theology Durga and Kali are not distinct or separate entities altogether. According to J.K. Sen, "they are entwinned together and in a sense are functionally united."[45] Hindu shastras endorse the fact that at the time of slaying the Asura or demon named 'Chanda', Goddess Durga grew angry and furious and Her face became dark. Then, out of Her brow emerged Goddess Kali. It would thus appear that the fundamental viewpoint which takes a synthetic notice of the twin dimensions of Durga and Kali never failed to attract the notice of the seers who put this spiritual allegory in a delectable way.[46]

Goddess Durga embodies within Herself three forces, viz., Creative, Preservative and Destructive. These three forces constitute Her triple primal qualities : *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*. As a creative force She is designated as Brahmani, as a preserving force, Vaishnavi, while as a force of destruction She is termed Rudrani. She is also called Jagaddhatri and Bhavatarini implying the supporter and sustainer of the universe, respectively. The name *'Uma'* viz., the Mother Goddess, attributed to Durga was, in the estimation of Pranab Bandopadhyay, probably derived from the word 'Ma' (viz., Mother). The term 'Uma' was very popular among folks to denote the deity of plenty.[47]

Apparently, the Durga Puja, or the Navaratri, denoting the nine-day worship of the Goddess, is a celebration of triumph. This nine days' celebration is offered to the Mother for successful struggle with the formidable demons led by Mahisasura. But, to a sincere spiritual aspirant the Puja means much more. It denotes the destruction of all impurities in a spiritual aspirant followed by his ascendancy into Godhood.[48] The destruction of the demon hordes led by Mahisasura, by Durga, is symbolic of the destruction of banalities and animal appetites in a spiritual aspirant.[49] Such destruction leads the aspirant from Jivahood (viz., the state of individualisation) to Shivahood (viz., the state of

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Self-realisation).[50]

Goddess Durga represents the energy aspect of Lord Shiva. Thus, She is a dynamic deity. Without Her, Shiva has no expression and without Shiva, Durga has no existence. Thus, both Shiva and His consort are virtually co-terminous with one-another and are mutually inter-dependent. In the words of Swami Shivananda :—

> "Siva is the soul of Durga; Durga is identical with Siva. Lord Siva is only the silent witness. He is motionless, absolutely changeless. He is not affected by the cosmic play. It is Durga who does everything."[51]

Shivananda has correctly assessed the position of Devi Durga vis-a-vis Her Lord and consort. Shakti or cosmic energy which is an essential attribute of Lord Shiva has been transferred to His wife for supreme application in the universe. The Dasabhuja manifestation of the Divine Mother is embellished with ten different weapons in Her ten hands. Sitting on a lion, She keeps up the play of Lord Shiva through the three attributes of Nature, namely Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Knowledge, peace, lust, anger, greed, egoism and pride, are all Her forms.[52]

Lord Shiva's multi-dimensional powers distributed among the lesser gods, men and beasts, through Durga, reflective of Her dynamism, is referred to in many Hindu religious texts. For instance, the *Devi Sukta* of the *Rig Veda Samhita* records that *Vak*, symbolising speech, identified as the daughter of sage Anbhirna, realised Her identity with the Divine Mother, the Power of the Supreme Lord Shiva, which manifests throughout the universe among the gods, among men and beasts and among the creatures of the deep ocean.[53] Again, in the Kena Upanishad it is recorded that the Divine Mother, Durga, shed wisdom on Indra and other gods and revealed to them the truth that their ultimate victory over the demons was effected with the help of Shiva's prowess manifested through Her.[54]

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The ascendancy of the spiritual aspirant from Jivahood to Shivahood takes nine days for culmination which, in turn, is reflective of the spiritual side of the Navaratri festival. The festival is divided into sets of three days epitomising three traits of worship of the divine Mother. Ultimate salvation of the spiritual aspirant lies after successful completion of these three stages of worship. Thus, on the first three days, the Divine Mother is invoked as the supreme power and force to root out all evils in the person of a spiritual aspirant. In this aspect the Divine Mother is worshipped as Durga the Terrible. While uprooting the baser animal instincts from the minds of the aspirant, She is said to simultaneously protect his spiritual practice from its many dangers and pit-falls. This ruthless form of Durga symbolises the destructive aspect of the Mother.[55] In a sense the ruthless elimination of the balalities signifies Durga's slaying of Mahisasura and other dèmons who are the embodiment of these animal passions in the worshipper.

Once the task of ruthless extirpation of the baser or animal propensities of the spiritual aspirant is complete, the next step is for him to built up a sublime spiritual personality by acquiring positive qualities in place of the already eliminated demonical traits of character. These positive qualities are co-terminous to immense spiritual wealth which the aspirant must earn in order to pay the price for the rare gem of *divine wisdom.* This stage is as important in the aspirant's career as the previous one. Durga as Mother Lakshmi enables him to acquire the positive qualities in this second stage leading to the development of a steady, calm, and pure personality. The positive qualities are characterised as divine wealth which Durga in the garb of Mother Lakshmi confers on the aspirant. This divine wealth is characterised as 'Devi Sampath'. Lakshmi is the wealth-giving aspect of the Goddess. Thus, the worship of Goddess Lakshmi is performed during the second set of three days of Navaratri.[56]

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The principal attributes of divine wealth are *Sattvik* or pure divine qualities which the spiritual devotee attains after elimination of evil propensities. On attainment he becomes competent to acquire supreme divine wisdom which dawn on him through Durga in the garb of Mother Saraswati, "who is divine knowledge personified, the embodiment of knowledge of the Absolute."[57] This knowledge enables Mother Durga working in the garb of Goddess Saraswati to kill the demon of ignorance born of tamas (viz., darkness), in the devotee.[58]

In Bengal, the Dasabhuja image of Devi Durga is flanked on either side by the images of Lakshmi and Saraswati who are designated as Her two daughters. This concept seems to conflict with the earlier interpretation of Lakshmi and Saraswati as being the manifestation of Durga to bestow spiritual wealth and spiritual wisdom on the devotee. However, the Mother-Daughter aspect worshipped in Bengal may be interpreted as distinct attributes of the Goddess Durga flowing through Lakshmi and Saraswati who, although represented as Her daughters, are one and the same with Her. The same may be said of Lords Ganesha and Kartick denoting the success and militant aspects of the mighty Goddess, respectively. Wealth, wisdom, success and militancy which are the cardinal features of Devi Durga, are thus distributed through four separate deities representing the daughters and sons of the mighty Goddess. This is not an illogical premise.

Such projections are present in Christian theology as well where Christ is labelled both as God as well as the Son of God. Here all the manifestations of the Supreme Father (viz., God) are present in His Son (viz., Jesus), making Father and Son one and the same entity. Likewise Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh and Kartick are one with Devi Durga, each possessing different attributes of the same Goddess.

Durga Puja is, thus, symbolic. The conflict between Durga and Mahisasura is symbolic of the tremendous fight between

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two opposing forces of light and darkness. As light is the symbol of life, and darkness that of death, the Durga symbol may be viewed as representing the eternal conflict between the forces of light and those of destruction. Light, again, is the embodiment of joy and pleasure, and darkness, of pain and misery. Again Durga's conflict with demon Mahisasura can also be interpreted as being symbolic of the clash between truth and mental illumination on the one hand, and darkness, deceit, falsehood and ignorance on the other. Thus, Durga may well stand as a subtle representation of the eternal conflict between, (a) truth and falsehood, and (b) knowledge and ignorance, in this world. And lastly, Durga may also stand for the eternal clash between sin and virtue, between our lower appetites and our higher instincts, and between the selfish and the altruistic in us.[59]

The quality of religious symbolism should always be judged by its capacity to appeal differently to different minds. Judged by this test Hindu symbolism enshrined in the Durga Puja stands out supreme by its appeal to one and all, whether old or young, rich or poor, ignorant or knowledgeable.[60]

Symbolism in Durga Puja is also manifested in Kumari Puja where the Goddess is propitiated as a virgin deity. The virgin character of the Goddess is adored with great regard. Her most important feature is that of Kanya-Kumari or a virgin girl. In order to symbolise the conception of worshipping Durga in the Kanya Kumari form, a female child below ten years of age is worshipped in many parts of India. The child is fed, clothed and served like the Goddess for nine days of the Navaratri ceremony. In Bengal, Durga is worshipped in the form of *Kumari* on the day of the Saptami marking the seventh day of the Navaratri, but the first day of the three days' Bengali worship. Her puberty symbolises fertility, and thus on the Saptami day She is worshipped as the Goddess of fertility. On the days of Mahastami and Mahanavami (corresponding to the second and the third day

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of the Durga Puja), She is worshipped with general rituals. The total period of three days of Her worship signifies the menstrual period of a woman. The menstrual discharge terminates on the third day. From the fourth day a woman is considered clean and purified after taking a post-menstrual bath. Thus, the pre- and post-menstrual durations of time are relevant from the beginning of the Kumari Puja on the Saptami day to the final termination of the Durga Puja on the Vijaya Dashami or the fourth day, i.e., the day of immersion of the Goddess.[61]

The worship of Durga in the form of Kumari or virgin girl is also significant in the context of Tantric ritualism. According to Tantric ritual an association with pre-menstrual virginity is necessary for esoteric performance in order to achieve *Siddhi*, i.e., fulfilment of *Sadhana* or spiritual exercise. In the Tantric cult a virgin or Kumari is considered to be a *Sadhan-Sangini* or a partner in Tantric rites.[62]

The Tantras refer to ten mystic forms of the Mother Goddess, viz., Dashamahavidya, Dhumavati, Bagala, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Bhuvaneshwari, Sundari, Tara, Kamala, Kali and Durga.[63]

The fertility aspect of Kumari Puja is also connected, symbolically, with the pre-historic fertility of cultivable land. This, again, is closely associated with Durga as the Goddess of Mother Earth bestowing fertility on the soil. The worship of Navapatrika during Durga Puja also stresses this point. This has already been discussed in an earlier part of this book. What has remained undiscussed, yet, is the significance of the yellowish bearing of Durga images and its association with the concept of fertility.

According to certain scholars, the yellowish colour of the body of Durga images symbolises the colour of matured paddy or wheat which assumes yellowish hue. The yellow colour of the fertilised seed also symbolises the yellowish tint of the female

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menstrual fluid.[64] Both being connected with reproductive potential, Durga's yellow frame is, thus, co-terminous with fertility.

Again, an earthen jar or pot which is placed before the image of the deity during Durga Puja symbolises the female sex-organ bearing the significance of fertility and progeny, while the clay image of Durga goes to indicate Her as Mother Earth.[65]

The earth collected from the doorsteps of a prostitute's home is also required to embellish the Puja. This earth symbolises *'punya'* or virtuosity which customers of brothels discard on the doorstep while entering the vice-ridden *(paap)* house of lust. Punya denotes good portending merit and such earth is thereby considered highly auspicious on a hallowed occasion like the Durga Puja.

The advent of Durga in Bengal every year during autumn is also highly symbolic in the sense that it denotes the yearly home-coming of a married daughter to her ancestral abode from her husband's home. Durga Herself is imagined as Uma, the daughter of Himalayas *(Giri Raj)* and his wife Menoka. Uma comes for a three day's sojourn during autumn each year to Her parent's house in Bengal. Thus, in the opinion of a Durga analyst :—

> "The Shastric injunctions of Durga Puja have been given the shape of a tender form of family in Bengal."[66]

On this occasion, all Bengali households long for the visit of their married daughters from their husband's homes. Sentiments of love and joy characterise this longing. The three days' stay at Her ancestral edifice being completed, Durga, as Uma, again departs for Her husband's home. This departure, symbolising the tragic separation of the daughter from her mother, causing pangs of great sorrow in the latter's heart, is expressed in numerous folk songs of Bengal known as the songs of Vijaya. On this occasion every Hindu household in Bengal, celebrating the Durga Puja, bids a tearful farewell to the Goddess. Married women of

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Bengali households adorn their heads with vermilion (sindur) taken from the head of the Durga image. This is reflective of their desire to remain in the married state till death, and not to fall into the curse of widowhood. Indirectly, this rite denotes a married Bengali woman's craving for the long life of her husband.

Thus, during the celebration of Durga Puja in Bengal, the Goddess becomes one (as human) with the members of each Bengali family where She is adored and loved both as their beloved daughter as well as their Universal Mother.[67]

As the Universal Mother, Her power aspect has been tempered by an infinite sweetness in Bengal, which is an essential characteristic of Bengal's genius. In many countries God is worshipped in the cult of Father, Master, King or Friend. The attributes of sternness, severity and ruthlessness which underlie the masculine character have made the male God an object of awe. However, to the Shakti worshippers in Bengal, it is the motherhood of the Divine that has made the strongest appeal. A master may be exacting, a king may be tyrannical, and a father may be severe while a friend may betray, but a mother never fails her own child. In the eyes of others she might look awesome in her might and dignity, but to her child she is never without a loving smile. And this power aspect of the Divine Mother has been further sweetened in Bengal by the conception of Durga as a married daughter visiting Her parental abode. And although She comes from Her mountain-home in Kailash, riding on a fierce lion and bearing in Her arms the most formidable weapons, the genius of Bengal has turned the lion into a domestic pet and robbed the weapons of all their terrors. The divinity of Durga is almost forgotten in the euphoria that overtakes the Hindu Bengali psyche during autumn and everybody jumps up to welcome and embrace the "long-lost daughter of the family."[68]

The significance of Durga's homecoming is closely intertwined with the results of Her visit. And this brings us to the symbolism

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of Her different modes of transport. There are four modes of transport that conveys the Divine Mother from Her celestial abode to the Earth and back. These are primarily the boat, the Dola or swing, the elephant and the horse.[69] Each transport has astrological connotations attached to it, and expert astrologers can predict the nature of events till the onset of the following Durga Puja from a close study of the Devi's vehicles to and from Her husband's home. Durga's advent or departure in a boat signifies ample rain leading to devastating floods which, although causing innumerable hardships on people, yet bestow them with bumper crops which follow from natural irrigation of the soil. Coming or going in a Dola or swing portends gross ills for a year in the shape of the frequent outbreaks of epidemics resulting in large-scale deaths and destruction. The entry and exit of the Goddess on a horse is also inauspicious as it signifies war and its attendant hardships followed by droughts, pestilence, and famines. The most auspicious mode of Durga's transport is, however, the elephant, which brings in its trains agricultural boon resulting in wholesale prosperity and a feeling of contentment among folks.

It is strange that the lion on which Goddess Durga rides to battle against Mahisasura, does not convey Her to the Earth. The reason for this lies in the *'Brahmanda Puran'* and an ancient text entitled *'Sreeshti Rahasyam Ba Bhagavatidattam'*.

According to these books, Brahma the Creator of the Earth had ten god-children. The grandson of one such god-child, Marichi, named Kamandak, propitiated the Goddess through rigid penance and prayers. Devi Durga, pleased with Kamandak's devotion appeared before him on the Earth to give boons. But Her martial form in which She appeared greatly purturbed Her supplicant who prayed to Her to appear before him in a more peaceable countenance. The Devi answered his prayer by appearing in a composed and motherly bearing. And from this time She selected four types of vehicles to convey Her to the

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Earth and back again to Her celestial home. The Devi and Her entourage, which included the lion, were from thence conveyed to the Earth and back by either the horse, the boat, the elephant or the Dola.

The Devi told Kamandak, that the lion would from henceforth be Her companion who would come to Earth with Her. And it would instil in the human race, the urge to become bold and strong.[70]

The image of the Goddess is shown with one leg atop a lion. The lion carries Durga to the battle-field where She contests the buffalo-demon and his numerous associates. The lion, according to *Shiva Puran*, was especially gifted to Durga by Lord Brahma to slay the demons Shumbha and Nishumbha. The *Kalika Puran*, however, gives a different version of the story, according to which Brahma gifted the lion to Durga to kill Mahisasura. The fight between Durga and Mahisasura is seen in the Kalikapuran as the conflict between the forces of light and truth or *'Sattva'* represented by the deity, and the forces of darkness or *'Tamas'* as symbolised by the buffalo-demon. However, overcoming the force of darkness through merely the force of Sattva was not feasible without the assistance of *fierceness,* a quality characterised by the word *'Rajas'*. As the lion signified this fierceness, it was chosen as Devi Durga's vehicle to the field of battle. Thus *Sattvaguna* in the Goddess and *Rajaguna* in the lion coalesced to successfully over-power the forces of *Tamas (or Tamaguna)* in Mahisasura. The lion, thus, is the emblem of ferocity required for vanquishing the dreaded foe of God and man.[71]

The Durga Puja is one of the most glorious festivals in Indian society combining within itself two distinct traits, viz., festivity and spirituality. However, among ordinary mortals the festive side of the worship of the Goddess wields more influence than the spiritual side which is somewhat relegated to the background

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amidst festive gaiety. Ordinary mortals, apart from paying respect to the Goddess through Anjali, indulge in merriment of the supreme order forgetting the spiritual attributes of this worship.[72] However, the spiritual importance of the celebration is of colossal merit designed to remove the darkness of our "Ajana-Avidya or Ignorance-delusion to the highest extent."[73] One of the noted works on the Goddess, Sri Sri Chandi, contains verses reflecting on the spiritual aspect of Durga worship. The cardinal among these verses which is recited during the worship of the Goddess is thus composed :—

"*Rupam Dehi, Jayam Dehi*
Yasa Dehi, Dviso Jahi"
(Sri Sri Chandi–Argala Stotra, 3)

In English parlance this prayer verse means :—

"Give me beauty, give me victory,
Give me Fame, destroy my enemies."

The four boons for which the Goddess is invoked during Durga Puja should not be understood in their prosaic literal sense, but must be viewed in their metaphorical and metaphysical contexts. In the first place, *'Rupa'* or *'Beauty'* ordinarily relate to bodily beauty. However, such beauty is transitory by nature. By 'Rupa', Sri Sri Chandi refers to something more permanent than mere bodily beauty, viz., beauty of the mind and soul. Mental beauty signifies Jnana or knowledge, the possession of which differentiates human beings from lower animals.[74] However, mere knowledge is inadequate unless it leads a person to the realisation of the beauty of the soul or Atman which is highly covetable because of its eternal and beneficial attributes.[75]

Secondly, 'Jayam', referred to by Sri Sri Chandi denotes victory, but this victory should not be interpreted as external victory over external enemies, but as internal victory over six types of animal-passions within us which act as six vicious internal enemies of man that cause disaster and doom. These

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animal-passions take the form of *'Kama'*, *'Krodha'*, *'Lobha'*, *'Moha'*, *'Mada'* and *'Matsarya'*, denoting respectively, *Selfish Desires, Anger, Greed, Delusion, Arrogance* and *Envy*. It is the conquest of these animal-passions that a genuine worshipper seeks through the help of the Goddess. The subjugation of our external enemies strictly is only possible after the conquest of our internal foes[76] highlighted above.

'Yaso' or fame, for which Durga is invoked also carries with it a metaphorical meaning far removed from worldly fame taking the shape of name, high position, political influence, etc. 'Yaso', here means eternal glory for which a spiritual supplicant prays to Durga.[77]

The last prayer of the worshipper concerns the destruction of enemies. Here also the word, 'enemies', refers not only to external but also to the six internal enemies mentioned above, and most appropriately termed as *"Sar-ripus"*.[78]

From a close perusal of the above points it may be adduced that Durga Puja, from the beginning to the end is essentially spiritual in character, involving as it does in the words of Dr. Roma Chaudhuri, "the direct realisation of the Divine Mother in all, viz., in every drop of water, in every grain of dust, in every atom and molecule externally; and equally in ourselves and others internally."[79] And the attainment of the above attributes through the blessing of the Goddess constitute the spiritual basis of Her worship. This realisation of the omnipresence of the Divine Mother is also embellished in the supplication of the spiritual aspirant through the medium of the following sloka, viz. :—

"Ya Devi Sarva-bhuteshu
Matri-rupena Samsthita
Namastasya, Namastasya,
Namastasyai Namo Namaha"
(Sri Sri Chandi, 5.73)

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or,

"Goddess who is present in all
In the form of Mother benign
Obeisance to Her, Obeisance to Her,
Obeisance to Her Deity Benign."

The Mahalaya heralds the advent of the Durga Puja. It signifies in Bengal the end of Pitri-Paksha or the termination of the time of ancestors and the commencement of Devi Paksha or the beginning of the time dedicated to Devi Durga culminating with Her immersion. On this occasion Hindus are seen doing tarpan or customary obeisance to their ancestors taking the shape of a holy dip in the Ganges.

THE DURGA PUJA : SABORNO RAY CHOUDHURY OF BARISHA

This coloured photograph is a restoration of an original circa 1925 B/W Photograph of 'Bara Bari Durga Puja'. 'Bara Bari' is a unit of the Savarna Ray Choudhury family of Barisha. It was founded by Ray Krishnadeva Majumdar Choudhury. The original palatial abode was built by him in circa 1710. The Durga Puja in question was started by Krishnadeva in 1717 AD and is one of the oldest Durga Pujas of Bengal. Seen in the photograph are (from Left)—Jagadish Kumar Ray Choudhury, Nibaran Kumar Ray Choudhury, Kulapurohit Narayan Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, Kinsukumar Ray Choudhury and Sitansukumar Ray Choudhury.

In 1610 the first Durga Puja of the Sabarna Ray Choudhurys was organised by Rai Laxmi Kanto Majumdar Choudhury, at *Barisha SAJHER ATCHALA CHANDI MANDAP*. He was the first Zamindar of the Sabarna Ray Choudhury family. Altogether, there were eight Durga Pujas in Barisha organised by different units of the Sabarna Ray Choudhurys. There were similar Pujas organised by the other sections of the Sabarna Ray Choudhurys at Halisahar, Panihati, Nimta - Birati, the last of which continues till to-day.

(Details provided to the author by Probal Ray Choudhury, Secretary & Chief Executive, THE SABORNO SANGRAHALAY).

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SABORNO R0YCHAUDHURI BARA BARI DURGA PUJA
Circa 1925

By courtesy, THE SABORNO SANGRAHALAY COLLECTIONS

(Details of this photograph on page 30)

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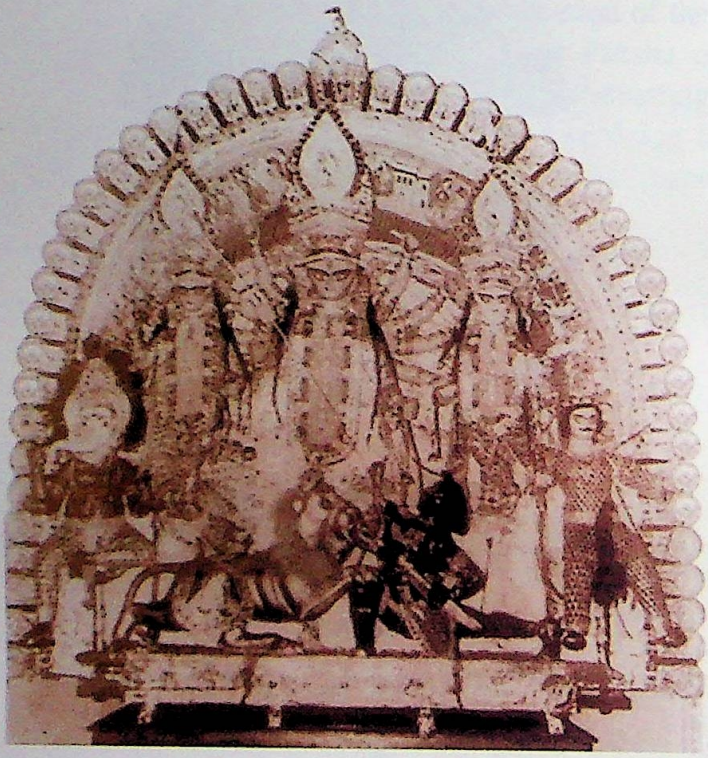

SHOVABAZAR RAJBATI DURGOTSOV (1930)

By courtesy,

Shree ALOKE KRISHNA DEB

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DURGA IMAGE

PUBLISHED BY
ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA (25th September 1935)

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MAHISMARDINI DURGA

PUBLISHED BY ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA 14th OCTOBER, 1936

FROM A DRAWING BY DULAL CHANDRA BASAK WHICH WAS ADAPTED FROM AN ANCIENT DURGA IMAGE

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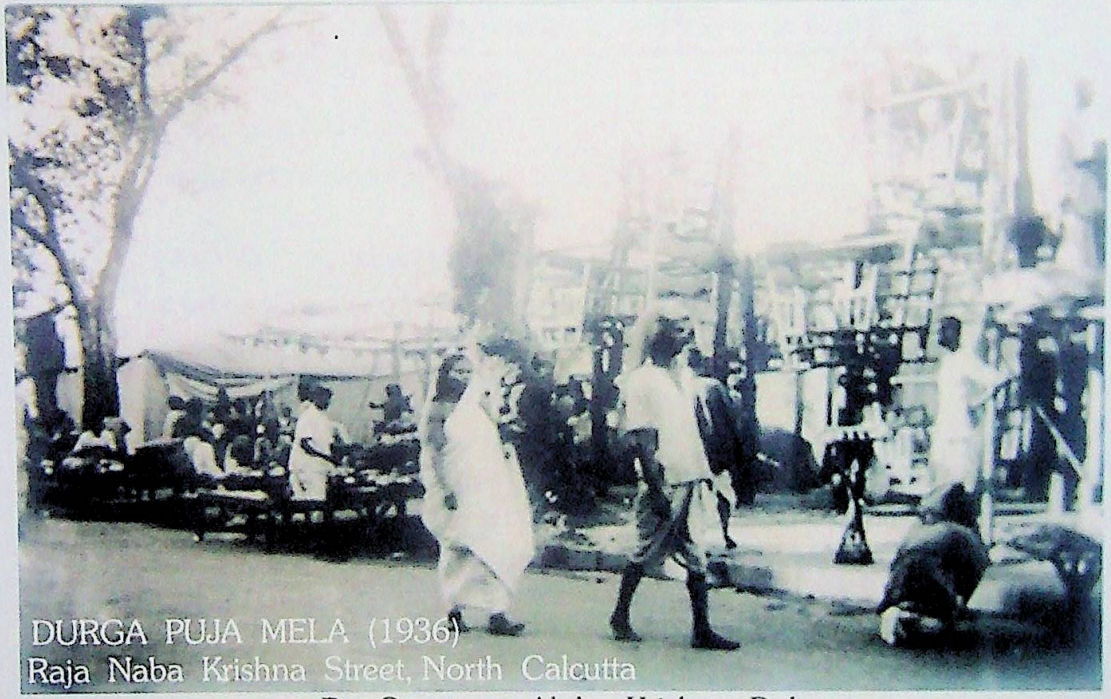

DURGA PUJA MELA (1936)
Raja Naba Krishna Street, North Calcutta

By Courtesy : Aloke Krishna Deb

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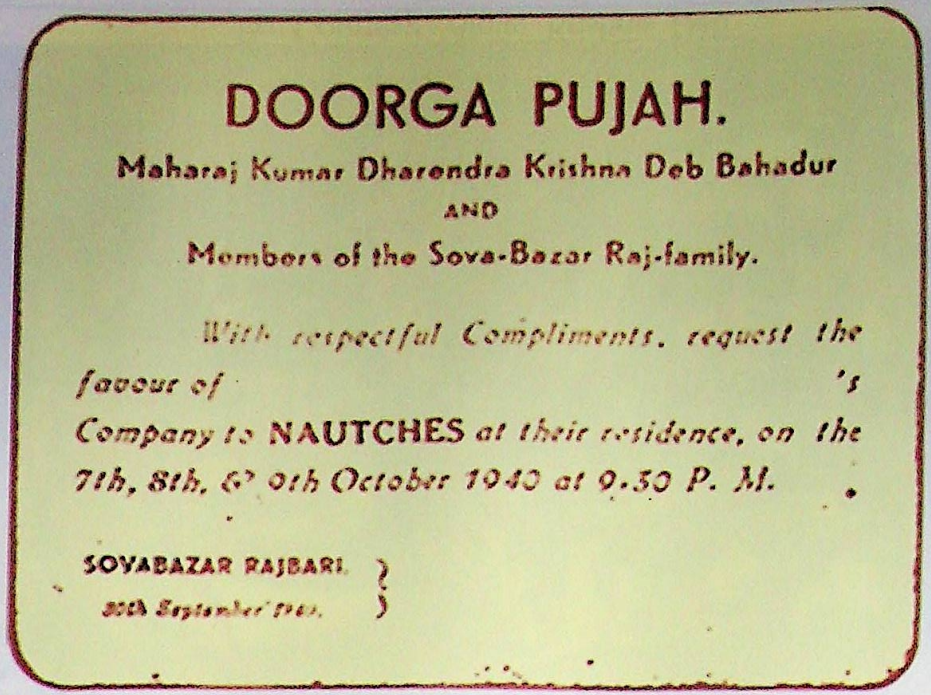

DOORGA PUJAH.

Maharaj Kumar Dharendra Krishna Deb Bahadur

AND

Members of the Sova-Bazar Raj-family.

With respectful Compliments, request the favour of ’s *Company to* **NAUTCHES** *at their residence, on the 7th, 8th, & 9th October 1940 at 9.30 P. M.*

SOVABAZAR RAJBARI.
30th September 1940.

INVITATION LETTER FROM SOVABAZAR RAJBATI
ON THE OCCASION OF DURGOTSAV. PHOTO : BY COURTESY, ALOKE KRISHNA DEB

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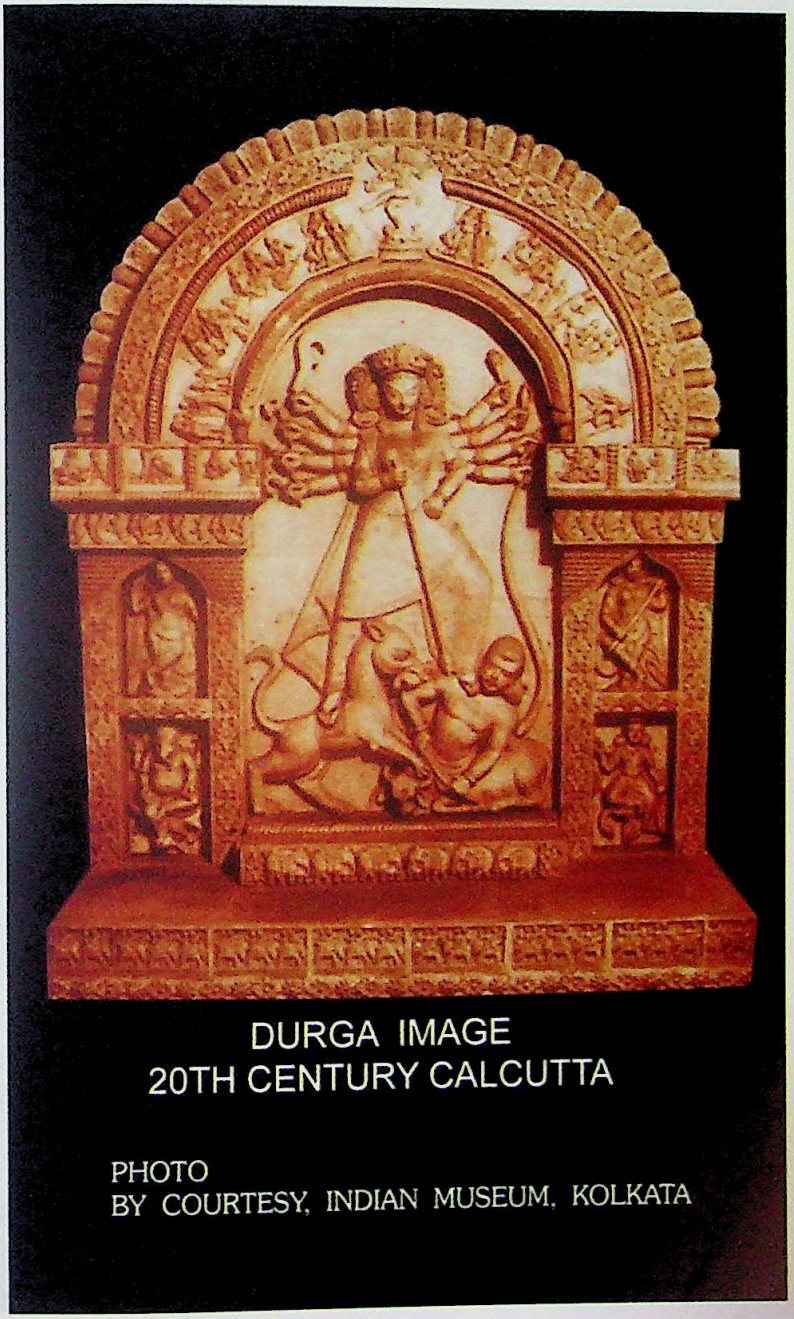

DURGA IMAGE
20TH CENTURY CALCUTTA

PHOTO
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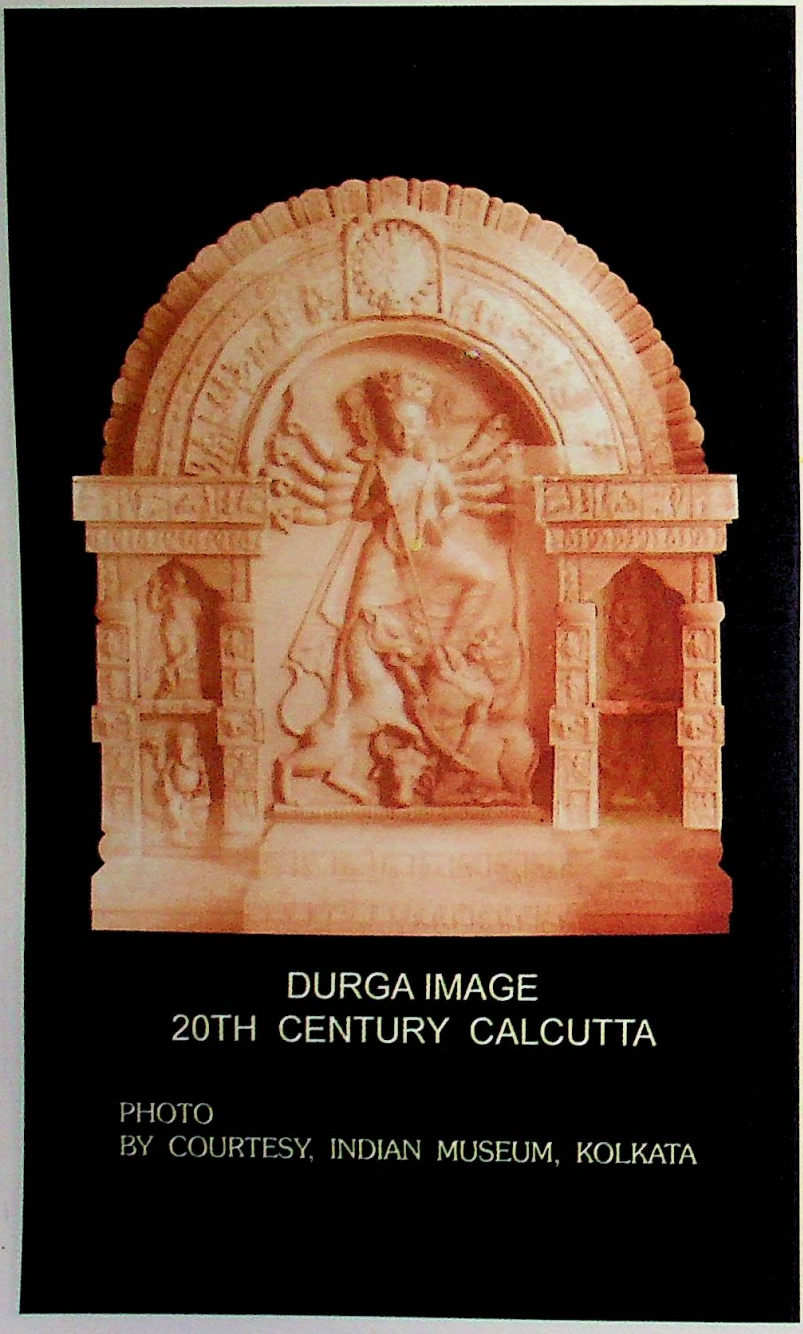

DURGA IMAGE
20TH CENTURY CALCUTTA

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Part-II

The Historical and Social Perspectives (1900—1947)

Although my thrust area for research is centred around the first half of the 20th century, it will be worthwhile to briefly trace the history of the Durga Puja festival in Bengal from earlier times. We have seen, earlier, how Raja Kansanarayan of Tahirpur in the Rajshahi district first organised Durga Puja in his zamindari during the reign of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. His example was emulated by others particularly Bhabananda, an ancestor of Maharaja Krishnachandra of Nadia, whose worship of the deity with much fanfare and ostentation in 1606 is recorded in the annals of history.[80] From the time of Krishnachandra, Durga worship became a grand private affair celebrated by Bengali zamindars and other elites in their homes. These edifices were provided with elegant *Thakur Dalans* or huge podiums where the images of the Goddess were placed. Only select invitees thronged these elitist homes during Durgotsav. Being family affairs, the general public were kept out of their purview, and, in this sense, they could not touch the minds of the humble multitudes. The poor or the downtrodden had no place in these princely affairs, thus eliciting much discontent and heart-burning. This traditional sort of Durga worship still persists today in some areas of Bengal, particularly Calcutta, although the rigid restrictions of the past regarding the entry of commoners have been much relaxed at present. This may be clearly evinced from a close study of the family Puja of the Saborno RoyChaudhuris of Barisha, which is recognised now as the oldest Puja in Calcutta, dating back to the year 1610, and conducted even today in a highly traditional style.[81]

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Family-based Durga worship continued in Bengal, particularly Calcutta, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although from 19th century onwards rules regarding the entry, if not direct participation of the general public in them, were much more relaxed than previously. Among such Pujas organised by the principal zamindari houses of Calcutta were the following:—

(1) The Durga Puja organised in the Kumartuli house of Dewan Abhoycharan Mitra (dt. 1800) by one of his successor, Dewan Govindram Mitra.

(2) The Durga Puja organised by Raja Nabakrishna at his Shovabazar residence in Calcutta which was attended by Robert Clive and a host of other Englishmen. This particular Puja, which still continues to persist in the city attracting numerous visitors to its fold, commenced at the instance of Raja Nabakrishna Deb after the English victory over Siraj-ud-daulah at Palassey. In those days the attendance of Europeans in zamindari tenements celebrating Durga Puja constituted a significant affair which enhanced the prestige of such houses. This is attested by the 10th October, 1829, edition of a Bengali newspaper, *Bangadoot,* which records the presence of Governor General, Lord William Bentinck, and the Supreme Commander of the British troops in India, Lord Combermere, in the palatial Shovabazar edifice of the Debs'. The vernacular newspaper further alludes to the presence of Europeans in the homes of other noted Bengali zamindars, namely Dewan Santiram Singh, and Raja Ramchand. Dinabandhu Mitter in his *'Surodhoni Kavya'* and Rajnarain Basu in his Bengali treatise *'Sakal Aar Aakal'*, also refer to the gaudy celebration in the Shovabazar Rajbati during Durgotsav. According to Basu, the invitations sent out to numerous Europeans by Raja Radhakant Deb Bahadur on this occasion considerably irked other Hindu landlords of the

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city who were more conservative on European presence in their homes than the magnanimous Raja of Shovabazar.[82] The revelry and grandeur of Durga Puja celebrations in Shovabazar were graced by dancing girls brought from various parts of the country (the foremost among them being Ashroon & Niki), to entertain the guests, particularly Europeans. This is attested by a news-item furnished by the *Calcutta Gazette* of 12th October, 1826 as well as by the *Bengal Harkaru* of the same date.

(3) The Durga Puja organised by the Dan family located at Jay Mitra Street of Darjipara, in North Calcutta, was first organised in 1760 by Ramnarayan Dan in the memory of his deceased daughter, Durga.[83]

(4) The Bhukailash Rajbari Puja of Khidderpore, Calcutta.[84]

(5) The Durgotsav organised by the Tagores of Jorasanko. Although Devendranath Tagore did not support this Puja after his conversion to Brahmoism, yet he did not directly put an end to it so as not to hurt the sentiments of other members of his family who insisted on worshipping the Goddess.[85] Of course, the Pathuriaghat branch of the Tagore family, which did not Brahmoise continued to celebrate Durga Puja in its premises.

(6) Durgotsav of the Basu Mallik family of Pataldanga now lying adjacent to Amherst Street. This particular Puja, 171 years old, was first established by Radhanath Mallik in 1831 who incidentally, was the founder of the Basu Mallik family of Pataldanga. A programme of classical songs graced the Mahanavami night while the morning of Vijaya Dasami was usually reserved for holding of Jatras. The Basu Mallik Durgotsav marked a subtle departure from the routine nautches that graced the celebrations in the homes of the Calcutta elites, and hence, in a sense, the Utsav was marked by sobriety and restraint.[86]

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(7) The Durga Puja of the Rupnarayan Ghosal family at Mirzapur Street in North Calcutta, was first organised in 1891 by Balaichand and Udaychand Ghosal.

(8) The Durgotsav of the Banerjee's at Patuatola Lane, North Calcutta, was started 220 years earlier by Krishnadhan Banerjee who migrated to Calcutta from Nabagram in the North 24 Parganas and established the Banerjee residence at Patuatola. Another branch of the same family performs a separate Durga Puja in a nearby house. This latter Puja started in 1890, having been organised by Benimadhav Banerjee, India's first native attorney.[87]

(9) The Durga Puja of Motilal Seal was organised in the 19th century by Motilal in Kalutala in North Calcutta.[88]

(10) The Puja of the Subarnabanik Mullicks of Barabazar. The image is a permanent one made of 8 categories of metals (Ashtadhatu). The image is wholly of Durga seated on a lion. There is no trace of Saraswati, Lakshmi, Kartick or Ganesha, neither is the Asura present. During the autumnal celebration of the Goddess regular animal sacrifices took place even though the family is Vaishnav. The gaiety and mirth accompanied by dancing, singing, and other activities which characterised the Puja in the 19th century have been endorsed by two contemporary Bengali newspapers, namely, The Sambad Prabhakar dated 9th October, 1854, and the Sambad Purnachandradoy of 26th September, 1865.[89]

(11) The Durgotsav of the Lahas of North Calcutta which was commenced around 1858 at their original ancestral edifice situated at No. 1 Bechu Chatterjee Street, and which was owned by three brothers, viz., Durgacharan, Shyamacharan and Bhagobati Charan Laha. With the amplification of their properties in the city, the Puja continued to be celebrated from 12 other houses besides the original one, and continues till today.[90]

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(12) Durga Puja of the famous Dutta family in Thanthania, North Calcutta, was started in 1855 by Dwariknath Dutta who rose to the position of a Baniyan of the East India Company from the position of a petty clerk in the English mercantile house of Jardine and Skinner. Dwariknath used to pay Puja bonus to his numerous employees. The celebration, graced with nautches and Jatras, was conducted with great fanfare and ostentation and is still celebrated thus today.[91]

(13) The Saradiya Durgotsav of the Chorbagan Mitra family at Muktarambabu Street in North Calcutta. The Puja was organised more than 360 years back by Ramsundar Mitra a forefather of the present Mitra descendent who still performs the Puja during autumn.[92]

Several other Pujas dating back to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are also held in Muktarambabu Street. They comprise, respectively, the Pujas of :

(14) Ramchandra Seal, being held for more than 160 years.

(15) Kesto Kishan Sen, son of Madhusudan Sen, being held for more than 220 years.

(16) Ramchandra Chattopadhyay, son of Kashinath Chattopadhyay, being held for about 150 years.

Almost all the Pujas held in old Calcutta which continue till the present day have maintained or have tried to maintain their distinct identities despite numerous constraints.

(17) Among these one of the foremost is the Saradiya Durga Puja held at the residence of Rani Rashmoni at Jaanbazar. This particular Puja was started about 211 years ago by Rashmoni's father-in-law Pitiram. Animal sacrifices were common in this Puja during the Rani's time who spent roughly Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 60,000 on this occasion. The Puja of Rani Rashmoni saw occasional visits of sage Ramakrishna Paramhansa, from 1866 to 1871. The Puja is still held today by the Rani's descendants who have kept

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up the traditional animal (goat) sacrifice during the occasion.

The sage of Dakshineshwar sanctified Saradiya Durga Puja celebrations in several other places in the city among which the most prominent ones were :—

(18) The Durga Puja at the home of Surendranath Mitra in Simla Street, (north Calcutta), in 1883-1884 and,

(19) The Puja celebrated at the house of Adharlal Sen at 97, Beniatola Street also in North Calcutta.

(20) Again, the saint paid a visit to the Simulia residence of his disciple Narendranath Dutta (who became Swami Vivekananda later on) on the occasion of Durga Puja.[93]

(21) The famous theatrician, Girishchandra Ghose, celebrated Durgotsav at his residence at 13, Basupara Lane of North Calcutta, in the presence of the saint's wife, Sarada Devi, in 1907.[94]

Among other illustrious family pujas of 19th century Calcutta were :—

(22) The Durga Puja of zamindar Kaliprasanna Singha in Baranasi Ghose Street in North Calcutta. Thousands were invited to witness the celebration and the zamindar took pains to entertain his guests with sumptuous food and drinks.[95]

Among some other noted family Pujas of North Calcutta originating in past centuries and still continuing till the present day, fleeting references may be made of the following :—

(23) The Puja established by Dr. Kailash Chandra Bose in 1880 as *Sarbasundari Durga Puja* in his residence at Kailash Bose Street, in North Calcutta, where guests were treated to a sumptuous repast and were entertained by the musical performances of a famous Baiji, Gahar Jan.[96]

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(24) The Durga Puja of the Sreemanis of North Calcutta, commenced by Calcutta zamindar Rakhaldas Sreemani more than 225 years ago.

(25) The Puja, started 150 years ago, by Gangaprasad Sen of Kumartuli.

(26) The Durga Puja commenced by Joygopal Bhattacharyya, a contemporary of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, at Kashi Mitra Ghat Street in North Calcutta.

(27) The 200 year old Hatkhola Duttabari Puja in North Calcutta.

(28) The Puja of the Dutta family of Balaram De Street, North Calcutta, started by Shyamdhan Dutta, in 1882.

(29) The Puja at the home of Calcutta zamindar Shib Krishna Daw, at Jorasanko, North Calcutta, first started by Gokul Chandra Daw, a scion of the family.

(30) The Puja of the Darjipara Mitra family of North Calcutta, nearly 200 years old. The Puja was started by Radhakrishna Mitter, son-in-law of the famous Calcutta businessman, Ramdulal Sarkar, in 1808.

(31) The Puja of the Mallik family of Darpanarayan Thakur Street, North Calcutta, more than 200 years old.

(32) The 150 year-old Durga Puja of the Basus of Beliaghata, North Calcutta.[97]

North Calcutta was the hub of Durga worship in the 19th century, as the principal *boniyadi* or traditional zamindari families had their homes in this part of the city. But this is not to discount the family Pujas held with much pomp and grandeur in Central and South Calcutta during this period, or even earlier.

The most pre-eminent among certain Central Calcutta Durga Pujas, dating back to the 19th or earlier centuries are the following :—

(33) The 200 year old Akrur Dutta family Puja, held in Bowbazar, till today.[98]

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(34) The over 205 year old Durga Puja of the Motilal family held at its residence at 1-C, Durga Pituri Lane. The famous Dewan of the East India Company and noted salt-merchant of Bengal, Biswanath Motilal, started this Puja which continues to the present day.

(35) The Saha family Puja over 200 years old, started by Ramgopal Saha at his Central Calcutta residence in 4, Thakurdas Palit Lane.

(36) The 172 year-old Durga Puja of the Sens of Kolootola in Central Calcutta, established by Madanmohan Sen at Brajanath Dutta Lane. The venue of this Puja was subsequently transferred in 1926 to the Amherst Street residence of Sambhu Sen, a scion of this family.[99]

(37) The 200 year old family Puja started by Raicharan Pal, at his Central Calcutta residence at S. N. Banerjee Road.

(38) The family Durgotsav organised about 125 years ago by Nilmoni Dutta at his Central Calcutta residence at 56/1, Doctor Lane which is held, till date, at the same place.[100]

South Calcutta also witnessed a healthy conglomeration of family Durga Pujas, the principal among whom were the following :—

(39) The Mukherjee family Puja of Behala started in 1770 and continues to the present day.

(40) The Haldar family Puja in Behala commenced by Hemchandra Haldar 125 years ago and is continuing till today.[101]

(41) The Durgotsav celebrated by the Roy family of Behala which is over 150 years old and was started by Rai Bahadur Chandi Charan Roy, who officiated as *Chief Translator* of the Supreme Court in Calcutta.

(42) The Mitra family Durga Puja at Chakraberia, in Bhowanipur, South Calcutta, commenced by Ramgovinda Mitra in 1757, which continues till today.[102]

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(43) The 125 years old Durga Puja started by Ramlal De at his residence at 26E, Chandranath Chatterjee Street of South Calcutta.

(44) The Sinha family Puja at Padmapukur, Bhowanipore, South Calcutta.

(45) The Durga Puja, conducted by the descendants of Girish Mukherjee, was first started by him at his South Calcutta residence at Girish Mukherjee Road around 1809-1810.[103]

The family worship of the deity in North Calcutta far outshone its counterparts in the central and southern parts of the city. This was primarily due to the concentration of the Bengali elite in North Calcutta. The competition for organising superior-styled Pujas among Hindu elites of the northern parts of the city resulted in glitter and revelry by rival zamindars or babus not witnessed to such an extent in the central or southern areas of the city. Thereby, Durga Puja in these latter sectors organised by zamindar or bhadrolok families paled out considerably when contrasted with their northern comparés.

The ongoing gaiety and mirth that marked these family Pujas of Calcutta, particularly in the 19th century, has been depicted in vivid details by Kaliprasanna Sinha in his literary Bengali masterpiece, *'Hutum Penchaar Naksha'*. With a crafty pen *'Hutum'* portrayed the huge expenditure marking almost every aspect of these family Pujas, the inordinate buying and selling that went on the occasion, the huge quantum of animal sacrifices, along with numerous instance of pilferage of goods and valuables by low-down thieves who eked out a miserable existence through the sale of such rifled articles. Neither did Hutum's pen spare the hypocrisis of the Western-educated Young Bengal scions of many such families, who, although in their mode of living emulated Western lifestyle, yet feigned reverence towards the Goddess in a novel way. In his analysis, Hutum incisively revealed how these individuals distorted the spiritual and social aspects of

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the Puja by holding gala feasts graced with wine and women in lieu of feeding Brahmin folks, and kept in bank the money that should have been correctly spent on paying fees to the officiating Brahmins. Hutum saw through their loathsome practice allowing people to enter the Puja venues with shoes on and criticised the Western attire of the idols of Devi Durga and Her numerous heavenly associates and children who accompanied Her on Her yearly autumnal sojourn to the Earth. Hutum derided the unholy practice resorted to by these gentlemen of bathing the *Kalabou* or *Naba Patrika* not in the holy water of the Ganges but in hot water prepared at home which after the bath of Kalabou was utilised in the preparation of tea or coffee for these people which, again, was drunk as Ma Durga's *'Prasad'* or *celestial food.* The eminent author also depicted the flight of the Nilkantha birds let loose on the occasion by numerous babu families of Calcutta during the immersion ceremony of the Goddess in order to boost the belief that these birds would inform Lord Shiva on the impending return of His spouse to His own home. Lastly, Hutum also portrayed with languid details, the spirit of melancholy and utter desolation overtaking the city of palaces after the termination of Durga Puja.[104] One fact clearly emerges from Hutum's analysis, viz., the large-scale absence of bhakti or spiritual reverence towards the Goddess during the entire ceremony, the multitudes generally engulfed in merriment which replaced spiritualism as the cardinal debutante of the Durga Puja festival. Sad to say, this sort of babu mentality of the 19th century has descended down to the present times which give Durga Pujas today a wholesale social instead of spiritual orientation. The ostentation and grandeur devoid of spiritual devotion that marked the celebration from the 19th century to the present day brazenly confirms Rabindranath Tagore's portrayal of an almost identical phenomenon in one of his immortal songs, viz. :—

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তোমার পূজার ছলে তোমায় ভুলেই থাকি।
বুঝতে নারি কখন তুমি দাও - যে ফাঁকি।।
ফুলের মালা দীপের আলো ধূপের ধোঁয়ার
পিছন হতে পাই নে সুযোগ চরণ ছোঁয়ার।

Dinendra Kumar Ray, in his Bengali book, *'Pallichitra'*, published in 1904 portrays vividly the Durga Puja ceremony in the mofussil, celebrated with much pomp in the house of a zamindar *(dewanjee)* in a rural setting. The Puja which attracted all and sundry among the rural folks, despite other parallel Pujas in the region organised by isolated groups, was fitted with grandiose regalia of pomp and pageantry befitting a zamindar's house. The enthusiasm of the visitors to this Puja, coupled with the gaiety and merriment of women brewing from the happiness pervading their minds on the yearly return home of their husbands from distant workplaces on the occasion, have been vividly depicted in the book which delves deeply into the psyche of the rural folks celebrating the occasion with new dresses and varying forms of entertainments. The pangs of Durga's departure epitomised by the sad strains of music filling the air on the occasion of Durga's immersion *(Visarjan)* on the *Vijaya Dasami day* have been depicted with rare clarity and precision that evokes a lively interest in the reader.[105]

The spirit of Young Bengal vis-a-vis Durga Puja, referred to by *Hutum*, finds another inordinate exposition in an article written by a Bengali social satirist, Indranath Bandopadhay, a contemporary of the famed Bengali novelist, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. The satire envisages a novel way of celebrating Durga Puja by people of the Young Bengal category who did not believe in image worship. For instance, even then, the image of Durga had to be modelled by a famous English sculptor who was ordered to shape the face of the Goddess in such a way that it bore a striking resemblance to that of Queen Victoria. Mahisasura was to be dressed and was not to appear barebodied

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in public gaze, while the lion and the snake, other accompanists of Durga, were to be clothed in rich satin garments. The officiating priests would be Europeans instead of Indian Brahmins, while the dancing girls who had to be appointed to entertain the guests had to furnish pass certificate in the Minor Scholarship Examination. The guests, according to this satirical write-up, had to be drawn only from the higher echelons of contemporary society, comprising the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, English Justices and Barristers, along with established zamindars of Bengal.[106]

This fashion of satirising the Durgotsav by Young Bengal indirectly pinpointed to their spirit of intense dissatisfaction with the traditional modalities of the ceremony with its huge expenditure, superstitious paraphernalia, and hypocritical actions of those actively involved in the ceremony. The Young Bengal craze for novelties was also instrumental in their new mental projections and attitudes towards organising a new form of Durga worship. Of course, the element of humour was also there and this was lapped up by later-day writers and satirists on the theme particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Especially significant in this context was an article in the Saradiya number of the noted Bengali Journal, *Anandabazar Patrika*, dated, 14th October, 1936, entitled *'Puja Progoti'*. The article, penned by one Amiya Gupta, wonderfully illustrates the total Europeanisation or Anglicisation of Durga Puja that would be held a hundred years hence, viz., in the year 2036. The craze for globalisation which is rampant today in our country, was non-existent in 1936, but the article, although dwelling on the effects of Anglicisation of Bengali society with its bearing on Durga worship, may be read today in the context of the after-effects of globalisation on Durgotsav that might occur in 2036, for if globalisation takes a firm footing on the human mind, India in that year would be reduced to a global village with a global

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society taking the place of the nationalist Indian mainstream society of today.

The 4-day ceremony as projected by Amiya Gupta was totally post-modern when judged by the standards of today. Durga and her two daughters, Laxmi and Saraswati, are depicted as being groomed in Western fashions, complete with bob-cut hair, ear-rings, and exquisite sarees fitted with broaches. Ganesh is clad in broad pantaloons and is fitted with a gas-mask which conceals his trunk. Kartick is dressed in modern-day military attire, and while Saraswati is provided with a guitar instead of her traditional veena, Laxmi Devi carries a kid-leather vanity bag denoting her wealth-giving attribute. Durga and party descends on Earth in a parachute, instead of their traditional carriers, viz., Dola, elephant, boat or horse and are welcomed by all and sundry. Those not present in the city which sports the Durgotsav, send telegrams welcoming the Mother. The telegrams are unique containing such satirical messages like, *'Best Wishes To Durga & Party'*, or *'Welcome Mother Durga'*, or *'Many Happy Returns'*, or *'Cheers : Mrs. Shiva'* or even an apologetic, *'Sorry : Can't Attend'*, revealing their Western orientations. The entire 3-days worship of the deity is done in a mechanical post-modern style, with scriptural incantations being played on the gramophone and the guests being treated to modern desserts instead of the traditional dishes. Electrical lamps of gaudy colours fitted to a circular beam with a handle is used by the chief priest (Purohit) for evening ritual worship or Arati, while songs in praise of Durga are played constantly on the gramophone. A German hooter replaces the traditional *ulu-dhani* or sound emanating from the mouths of tongue-twisting women during the worship ceremony, while goat-sacrifices are done smoothly and quietly with the assistance of an imported *'Goat-Cutter'* machine, that manages to severe the poor animals' heads from their bodies without spilling blood and messing the place of worship, the blood of the

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animals being probably collected by a concealed bucket right under the legs of the machine. The immersion ceremony of the Goddess, again, is highly mechanical, being conducted by electric cranes commissioned for the purpose. The article indirectly criticises the effects of the possible impending modernisation of the Durga Puja ceremony in the future followed by intense mechanisation which threatens to drive out all verve and spirit from the Puja and render it a more or less lifeless mechanical affair in times to come, so different from its liveliness and spontaneity talked about by Bipin Chandra Pal in his winsome essay in Bengali entitled, *'Bangalir Protima Puja O Durgotsav'*,[107] and Panchkori Bandopadhyay in his literary piece in Bengali, *'Bangalir Durgotsav'* published in the Bengali Journal, *'Sahitya'* in 1909 *(B.S. 1316)*.

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Part-III

The Baroari and/or Community Durga Pujas

Although gorgeous family Pujas ruled the roost in 18th and 19th century Calcutta and in the mofussil areas, they were not wholly popular. Though a fairly large number of ordinary mortals had access to some such zamindari households on the occasion, there were many among the stiff-necked babus who refused to admit pedestrian folks into their houses during Durgotsav. As seen earlier, the prestige of a zamindari family was measured in terms of the numbers of European visitors to its portals during Durga Puja, and landlords in Calcutta and the mofussil vied with one-another in this respect.

However, the flow of European guests to these palatial edifices began to register a sharp decline from the second half of the 19th century for several reasons.

The first was a legislation introduced by the Company's Government in 1840 interdicting Englishmen from attending ceremonies connected with the religious festivities of the natives. Although many English officials in the Company's payroll paid only lip-service to this ordinance and a considerable number of them continued to flock to rich bhadralok tenements to enjoy Durgotsav till almost the end of the second decade of the 20th century[108], the law still succeed in holding back a sizeable section of European clientele to these houses.

Secondly, from the end of the first half of the 19th century European patronage of the Hindu Bengali babus began to register a moderate decline. This was due principally to two factors. In the first place, the European dependence on natives was perceptibly on the wane. The Company's Government was firmly entrenched in power having over-powered most of its enemies in

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the country. In the next place, this time witnessed the amplification of Europeans in the country, particularly in Bengal. They could now intermingle with their own kith and kin in the European quarters of Calcutta – what with the proliferation of clubs and English institutions in the city, instead of patronising natives and their numerous heathen festivities. Already Christian missionaries from Great Britain and other Western nations were clamouring against European patronage of heathen customs and religious ceremonies and quite a few Englishmen could be weaned into their line of thinking by not conceding to have any connexion with un-Christian native souls, however rich or influential the latter might have been. To this was superadded the phenomenon of European racism which bitterly offended mainstream Indian society.[109] We have earlier noted how Radhakanta Deb Bahadur offended many landlord babus by his wide invitations to numerous Europeans on the occasion of Durga Puja at his Shovabazar residence. Again many babus refrained from inviting European guests to their homes on the occasion. This acted as a backlash against British racism.

Another principal cause fomenting the start of community or Baroari Pujas in Calcutta and its environs was the fall in the number of Durga Pujas in rich landlord families owing to constant litigation over property matters among their numerous members or constituents. This caused huge economic losses among co-members of such families resulting in many such households stopping, permanently, the holding of Durga Puja in their residences or at least curtailing expenditure on the festival to such an extent that the number of guests had to be toned down to meagre minimum.[110] Ordinary people were generally left out and the cavalier and stiff-necked attitude of the babus kept them at a distance by prohibiting their entry into their households during Durgotsav. To overcome their frustration the humble sought alleviation of their social distress through organising community

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or Baroari Durga Pujas by collecting subscriptions for the purpose.

The first known Baroari Durga Puja occurred at Guptipara in the Hooghly district of western Bengal when twelve young men were debarred entry to a household Puja. Visibly enraged, these twelve men decided to organise a Puja among themselves through the collection of subscriptions. Forming a twelve-member committee amongst themselves they organised the first public or community Durga Puja, henceforth termed Baroari, the latter name being derived from the twelve *(Baro)* friends *(yar)* who organised the ceremony. A plaque at a shrine situated at Bindeshwaritala, in the Hooghly district, dates this particular event to 1168 Saka, viz., 1761 A.D., although the Baptist Missionary monthly, the *Friend India*, published from Sreerampur, furnishes the date as 1790.[111]

Subscriptions to these Baroari Pujas were obtained by both fair and foul means, and where persuasion failed, organisers resorted to coercion. One form of coercion was to leave an image of the Goddess before the house of a householder refusing to pay subscriptions for the Baroari Puja. The act was usually done at the dead of night and, as local custom made it mandatory for a person before whose house such an image was left, to conduct a full worship ceremony entailing quite a heavy expenditure, the practice was dreaded by very many householders.

However, there were certain daring denizens who cared a damn for custom and either refrained from arranging Durga Pujas at their homes, or simply destroyed the idols thus deposited before their premises at random.

A case in point occurred in 1820 at Belghoria village near Calcutta where one such enraged householder cut into pieces a Durga image, left before his home at night and threw the same into a local pond. The incident was reported in the Bengali newspaper, *Samachar Darpan*, dated 23rd September, 1820.

Non-payment of Durga Puja subscriptions was not the only

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cause for such action which was also caused by private enmities or the meagre sale of Durga images on particular years. The *Samachar Darpan* of 13th October, 1832, reports instances of Durga images being abandoned before houses of several people of Calcutta and the mofussil owing to the paucity of numbers of such images sold. The *Darpan* also reported the forced celebration of Durga Puja by some of these folks through sale of jewellery.

Another form of coercive extortion lay in way-laying harmless womenfolk travelling by palanquins and showering them with abusive language thereby forcing them to hand over their jewellery and other belongings, the sale of which brought money to Baroari coffers for celebrating the occasion. The Bengali newspaper, *Sambad Bhaskar*, of 1840, refers to such a form of extortion. The newspaper further alludes to steps taken by the Magistrate of the 24-Parganas, Mr. Payton, to stop this scandalous and crude form of fleecing. Dressed as a female, he hired a palanquin and rode off, and on being surrounded by hooligans demanding Durga Puja subscriptions, he disembarked from the palanquin, discarded his female attire, and with the assistance of the local police, arrested the culprits.

Very often poor people were forced to part with their meagre incomes and had they the temerity to object they were brought under the pale of social ostracism. A letter to this effect was published in an issue of the *Education Gazette* of 1871, the writer being a sufferer resident at the village of Boinchee in the Hooghly district. The writer demanded the imposition of a tax on Baroari Pujas in order to punish their corrupt mafia-oriented organisers whose extortions, resembled similar acts during Durgotsav in present times.

There were, however, some Baroari organisers who resorted to more cultured ways of raising money. One such way was through organising lotteries. The 26th October, 1822 issue of *Samachar Darpan* furnishes a detailed account of organising of

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a Baroari Durgotsav at Shibpur village in Howrah through a lottery arranged by local youths.

The term *'baroari'* came to be replaced by the word *'Sarbajanin' (viz., for all men)* from the time of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in 1910.[112] Of course, Sarbajanin Pujas were more broad-based than Baroaris and where only a few people organised Baroari Pujas, an entire locality with distant clientele marked Sarbojanin Pujas. Formerly, in the case of family Pujas, or early baroari Durga Pujas, images of the Goddess and her train were made purely out of mud and their ornaments, dress and weapons were also constructed with the same material. Modellers used to come every year prior to the Pujas in many babu households to mould the images. However, with the advent of the Sarbajanin Pujas some modellers, who very often hailed from distant villages, set up permanent abodes at Kumartuli in Calcutta from where it was much easier to supply an ever increasing clientele of such Pujas in the city and its environs.

Gradually images made solely out of mud and clay came to be replaced by other appurtenances like shola or white cork or pith. Coloured foil also came to be used in the manufacture of Sarbajanin Durga images, mainly, and were termed as *'Daker Saj'* as the foil used for the purpose was first imported through dak or post.[113]

Again *Ekchela* or single-unit imagery comprising the Goddess, Her four children, Laxmi, Saraswati, Kartick and Ganesh, which was formerly used, especially in family Pujas, was replaced by individual imagery, depicting the Goddess and Her four children with their respective bahans or carriers in separate sets or compartments. The latter way of exhibiting the models in separate frames came to be introduced from the 1930s, by the famous Kumartuli modeller Gopeswar Pal. The same architect of Durga also modelled Her image in the famed Gandhar style of ancient

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Indian architecture, The Gandhar style of imagery became extremely popular in the latter decades of the first half of the 20th century and continued subsequently for a long spell of time, eliciting praise from local newspapers. For instance, commenting on the unique craftsmanship that went to fashion a Durga image installed during the 1954 Durgotsav of the Bhowanipur Milan Sathi Club of South Calcutta, the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 4th October of that year commented :—

> *"An outstanding Durga image for Bhowanipur Milan Sathi Club. The artist claims to have introduced Gandhar technique in the execution of that image."*

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Part-IV

Nationalism and Related Social Issues in Sarbajanin Pujas

Coming to the social, cultural and historical aspects of the community Durgotsav, it is seen that Sarbajanin Pujas commenced in Calcutta and its immediate environs roughly one hundred and twenty years after the first recorded Baroari Puja organised at Guptipara, Hooghly.[114] The utsav was meant to be an occasion of joy and hilarity for the multitudes, encompassing Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Sarbajanin Pujas were thus endowed with a cosmopolitan character, hitherto unknown in the City of Palaces. Gradually it took the shape of a festival dedicated to Mother India where Durga came to be equated to our Mother Nation. This attitude towards the Puja, in general, was sought to be eagerly lapped up by the nationalist elements of Bengal aspiring either for more civil rights under colonial rule or total emancipation from foreign yoke, in the later half of the nineteenth and the first four decades of the twentieth centuries.[115] Nationalist leaders, with varying shades of opinions, flocked to these Sarbajanin Puja pandals from distant parts of Bengal to infuse the public with a spirit of freedom through their speeches delivered from rostrums, especially constructed for these occasions. They often led the public in offering prayers to the deity in the name of absolute independence or *Swaraj*. Again, the *Vijaya Sammilani* marking the culmination of the Durgotsav festivities, together the Birastami festival during the Pujas, marked by gymnastics and athletics, were public forums where fiery speeches were very often delivered by the advocates of freedom from British rule. Thus, the festival became a nationalist affair where a distinct political spirit began to erode to some extent its spirituality, which had already fallen prey to the social hiatus

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and intense merriment generated on the occasion.

The nationalists who thronged to the numerous Puja pandals in the city were thrilled with a subtle message "supposedly" conveyed to all by the Divine Mother, viz., the employment of physical power to overcome and eliminate brute force.[116] Brute force was symptomatic of evil epitomised by foreign rule. And as the attainment of peace was impossible without resistance to evil, according to the message of Durga, the nationalists were goaded on to inspire the masses flocking to the Sarbajanin Puja podiums with a spirit of violent resistance to British rule. The ultimate spiritual objectives enunciated by Durga-worship to attain truth and spiritual wealth could wait for the present, according to the nationalists, but winning of *Swaraj* through resistance to foreign rule, culminating in its final overthrow, could not. This becomes clear from a close study of contemporary newspapers and documents on the subject particularly some of the issues of Amrita Bazar Patrika of the first half of the 20th century. Again, although European clientele to family Durgotsavs had registered a sharp decline, as shown earlier, the presence of European officialdom and Indian bureaucrats employed in Government service was substantial in Sarbajanin Durga Pujas before nationalists took over, and even after the latter phenomenon those community Pujas which did not wish to wound Europeans feelings refrained from inviting the nationalists and instead continued to encourage European or Indian bureaucratic participation.

The nationalist truck with Durga Puja celebrations was not without its minus-points from the beginning of the 20th century when nationalist elements doused themselves in the spirit of Hindu-revivalism and involved themselves in the freedom struggle by chanting hymns from the Gita. This considerably irked their Muslim counterparts who alienated themselves from the Hindu Swarajists. The rift between the two communities may be dated

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back to this time. The *Bandemataram* song of the nationalists was resented by scores of Muslim politicians who saw in the same a Hindu conspiracy to dislodge them from all power and prestige in independent India, although Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the composer of the above song, did not dream of anything antithetical to Islam when penning it.

Hindu nationalists, in turn, were similarly outraged by the pampering of Muslim communal sentiment as seen in Gandhiji's truck with the Ali brothers in launching the Khilafat Movement.[117]

The antagonism between the two communities took on a sinister turn as time passed, ultimately leading to Muslims boycotting Durga Puja functions and protesting loudly, as we shall see later, against Visarjan procession passing by mosques.

As a result of this unfortunate unfolding of events the Muslims eyed Durga Puja as a wholly Hindu affair. And to some rabid exponents of the Muslim creed the worship of Shakti, i.e., Durga, came to be equated with eliminating Muhammadans. The term *'Asur Nidhan'* or slaying of Asuras, used in Durga Puja parlance, was seen as co-terminous to the killing of Muslims.[118] Doubly unfortunate, again, was the attitude of certain editors of communally minded Hindu newspaper who filled up the pages of their autumnal numbers with articles fanning anti-Muslim sentiments, which brought down the Puja from the lofty pedestal of social and communal harmony of yester-years to a mundane communal platform.[119]

These features will be highlighted later on in this book, but for the present it would be worthwhile to refer to some noteworthy Sarbajanin Durga Pujas in Calcutta in the first half of the 20th century.

The first recorded Sarbajanin Durga Puja in Calcutta was organised by the *Sanatan Dharmatsahini Sabha* membered by the residents of Balaram Basu Ghat Road in Bhowanipur in 1910. This was followed by the Shyampukur Adi Sarbajanin

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Durga Pujas in North Calcutta organised by the residents of Telipara Ramdhan Mitra Lane in 1911, and the Sikdarbagan Sarbajanin Durgotsav again in North Calcutta in 1913.[120]

The first nationalist community Durga Puja was organised at the behest of the Simla Byayam Samity in North Calcutta in 1926 where an eminent nationalist-cum-revolutionary, Atindranath Basu, conducted the rituals on the principles of *'Matri Aradhana'* or the worship of the Goddess in the image of *'Mother India'*.

Most nationalised Sarbajanin Durgotsavs in the city from thence onwards were conceptualised after Bankim's Bandemataram song which was intended to inspire nationalist devotees clamouring for freedom.[121]

Eminent nationalist leaders graced the Puja podiums by their presence. This was evident from the distinguished political visitors to the puja organised by Simla Byayam Samity among whom were Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu, his brother Saratchandra Basu, along with Bhupendranath Dutta, Upendranath Bandopadhyay, Kiron Mukherjee, etc. In 1939, this Sarbajanin Puja was inaugurated by Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu which made it a pivotal focal point of nationalist euphoria.

The Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav was the next in line of pre-eminent Pujas of North Calcutta in the first half of the twentieth century. Starting off as a Baroari Puja in 1919 by some angry young men who were denied access to a prominent family Durga Puja in the locality, these disgruntled folk organised the Nebubagan Baroari the venue of which were repeatedly changed until finally it acquired a permanent site at Durganagar in the Baghbazar area where the Puja is still held today. In 1926, it was decided at a meeting held at the home of one Pasupati Bose to convert the Nebubagan Baroari Puja to a broadbased community Puja or Sarbajanin Durgotsav. The proposal, emanating from one Ramaniranjan Guha Roy, was unanimously accepted and the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav came into being. A remarkable

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feature of this particular festival was the frequent presence of eminent personalities in its fold like Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy and Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu, the latter being elected President of the Baghbazar Durga Puja Committee in 1938-39. From 1929-30 onwards this particular Puja became a forum for radical nationalist thought and action with a Swadeshi industrial fair organised on a small scale followed by the display of gymnastics at the Birastami festivals organised each year on Mahastami afternoons.[122] The Birastami gymnastic was meant to infuse a spirit of heroism amongst the Bengali youths which constituted a cardinal imperative in their participation in the freedom struggle. Byayamacharyya Basanta Kumar Banerjee was usually the master of ceremonies during Birastami programmes launched by Baghbazar Durgotsav Committee and other parallel committees organising Sarbajanin Pujas in different parts of the city.

An important aspect of the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav was the organisation of different lectures delivered by pre-eminent personalities on socio-cultural topics of the time. These again veered on subjects connected with social health and hygiene which were imperatives in building a nation clamouring for freedom.

Thus in 1937, the Baghbazar Puja Committee organised a lecture on *'Social Problems of Bengal'* by Brajendranath Bhadra, Assistant Publicity Officer of the Calcutta Corporation, concerning the degenerating life of the province. Remedial measures intended to solve Bengal's problems also featured at this lecture. The lecture was demonstrated by means of the magic lantern and was followed by the public screening of health films.[123]

Again, in 1947, the same Committee hosted a lecture on the occasion by K. L. Bose on *General Health and Hygiene'*, accompanied by a programme of Tarza songs.[124]

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In 1946, the Panchanantala Puja Committee members in Howrah, adjacent to Calcutta, organised a public subscription-gathering programme for the *Indian National Army* fighting for independence.[125] This venture was distinctly political and nationalist in tone.

With the dawn of independence in August, 1947, the question of nation-building stalked the minds of the educated elites, and lectures on the score were arranged by several Durgotsav Committees in Calcutta. Even here the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav Committee ruled the roost with the eminent historian, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, lecturing before a considerable gathering at Baghbazar on the importance of re-building the nation harrassed by 200 years of foreign exploitation.[126] The nationalist ego was still manifest in the function which commenced with the singing of the *Bandemataram* and the hoisting of the national flag by Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, a prominent nationalist enthusiast.

The Birastami Utsav on Mahastami days organised by the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav Committee seems to have eclipsed all other parallel functions organised by it, prior to independence with *Rakhi Bandhan* ceremony forming an integral part of the programme. Thus, in September, 1941, Birastami and Raksha Bandhan or Rakhi Bandhan ceremonies organised by the Baghbazar Durgotsav Committee was found to run concurrently, in which eminent freedom-fighters delivered addresses on the necessity of physical fitness of the country's youth who were considered as the cardinal elements to fight foreign-rule.[127]

Although the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav usually stole the show by its flamboyance and multiple attributes, other community Pujas organised in different parts of the city also exhibited their share of brilliance and affluence. For instance, the display of physical feats during the Birastami celebrations, together with lectures on physical fitness and Swadeshi were organised by many other community Pujas. The Amrita Bazar

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Patrika of 28th September, 1941, gives a vivid account of the *Kasi Dutta Street Sarbajanin Durgotsav,* where the unveiling ceremony of Durga and Her children was conducted by the famed medical practitioner, Dr. U. N. Brahmachari. The Puja hosted a function where physical feats were displayed by the members of a body-building club named the *'Young Mens' Physical Association'* under the supervision of the famed *Byayam Guru,* Basanta Kumar Banerjee. The programme, containing sixteen items of feats, was brilliantly conducted, with Master Basanta's *'Drawing Room Athletics'* and *'Aerial Trapeze'* performed by Master Mantu, being highly appreciated. The title of *'Vir Malla'* was conferred on Basanta on the occasion as a mark of appreciation for his physical feats, while a gala Mahapuja fete was also a major attraction at this community Durgotsav.

Byayamacharya Basanta seems to have been a very familiar figure in principal community Pujas of Calcutta. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of September 28, 1941, furnishes a vivid account of his association with these Sarbajanin Pujas, the principal amongst which were organised by the following clubs of North Calcutta, viz. :—

(a) Beniatola Adarsha Byayam Samity.
(b) Sinthee Rash Behari Adarsha Byayam Mandir in South Dum Dum.
(c) Mitra Pukur Athletics Union.
(d) Tarun Byayamagar and Shakti Sangha.
(e) Naba Milan Club which organised the Naba Milan Sarbajanin Durgotsav at Badam Roy Lane in Beliaghata.

While presiding in the Puja Pandal inauguration in some Sarbajanins like the Naba Milan Club, or showing feats in others, he, viz., Basanta, also utilised several Sarbajanin Puja podiums as platforms to win new recruits to his mission of establishing a fraternity of body-builders and gymnasts. Thus, at the Mitra Pukur Athletes Union, which launched a Community Durga

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worship in North Calcutta, a number of young men were seen publicly taking oaths of allegiance to Acharyadev Basanta Kumar Banerjee.[128]

The persistent interest of nationalist-minded Sarbajanin Puja organisers in improving the health of the country was seen in their organising of health exhibitions and sundry lectures on health matters at their respective Puja grounds. A health exhibition was opened on the Puja grounds of the Sinthee Rash Behari Adarsha Byayam Mandir, while at the Belgachia Durgotsav Exhibition, inaugurated by the famous editor of Amrita Bazar Patrika, Tushar Kanti Ghose in 1941, the noted personality spoke at length on the necessity of improving national physique thus:—

> "In a country like ours" he remarked while opening the Health, Fine Arts and Industrial Exhibition at the Belgachia Durgotsav, "where the vast masses of the population are totally ignorant of health and hygiene rules, such exhibitions are essential."[129]

Besides speaking on health matters, Mr. Ghose also urged upon the necessity of developing indigenous cottage industries to develop Swadeshi products, the use of which would tend to foster a spirit of nationalism among Bengali folks.[130] Similar nationalist sentiments were aired by Mr. Ghose at Beadon Square Club Sarbajanin Durgotsav in North Calcutta in the same year.

The spirit of nationalism was rife among the organisers of most community Pujas in the city and its suburbs. Thus, in 1941, Kumar Bimal Chandra Sinha, a scion of the Paikpara Raj, while presiding over the opening ceremony of the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav and exhibition, spoke at length on the value in developing national consciousness.[131] Eminent personalities like Narendranath Das, Devendranath Mukherjee, Bhutnath Mukherjee and Kiron Chandra Dutta, also addressed the gathering, assembled on the occasion, on the same theme.

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Similarly, at the opening ceremony of the Gauriberia Sarbajanin Durgotsav and exhibition in North Calcutta in the same year, Mr. Phanindranath Brahma, the Honourable Mayor of Calcutta, requested the audience to practice the cult of Shakti embodied in Goddess Durga, so that they could become strong and powerful; strength and power being cardinal imperatives in nation-building and extrication from foreign rule. The nationalist fervour of the audience on the occasion received a strong boost with a lively presentation of the Bande Mataram song by the girls of the *Akta Sangha* Club.[132]

Goddess Durga as the embodiment of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India was worshipped by members of the *'Yubak Sammilani'* who organised a Community Durgotsav at Monsatola, in North Bantra, Howrah, in the same year, while the concept of Shakti and its utility in inculcating nationalism among the country's youth, was stressed by eminent speakers from the public rostrums adjoining community Puja mandaps at Ahiritola[133] and Sovabazar, in North Calcutta.[134]

Durga, as Universal Mother, could not be the monopoly of the upper caste Bengali only. The lower orders had every right to organise Durga Pujas in the city and its suburbs where the spirit of social ostracism perhaps reigned supreme and where probably the lower classes or untouchables were barred entry to Pujas organised by the upper echelons of Bengali society. And this was done by the pedestrian Hindi classes with a vengeance and elicited widespread admiration. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 21st October, 1947, and that of September 27, 1941, respectively, make pointed reference to the same.

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Part-V

Durga Puja for The Pedestrian Classes

Furnishing interesting information on a sweepers' Durga Puja in Calcutta in 1941, the Amrita Bazar Patrika records thus :—

> "A striking feature of this year's Puja is that the *methars* or sweepers of a certain part of the city have made their own arrangements for worshipping Deviji. This particular celebration should provide a platform on which Hindus representing every class should make it a point to meet. Untouchability cannot exist on sanctified ground."

Again, in 1947, the subaltern class of washermen or *dhobis* of Calcutta, Howrah, and suburbs, jointly organised the worship of the Goddess at the premises of *162A Southern Avenue* in South Calcutta. The entire celebration was marked by a spirit of sobriety and brotherhood which was particularly stimulated by an address to a gathering of washermen delivered on the occasion by Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghose, the Honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal.[135]

It would now be worthwhile to delve into the history of certain community Pujas in Calcutta, barring the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav which has already been discussed at length.

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Part-VI

General Sarbajanins in City & Suburbs

The Kumartuli Sarbajanin Durga Puja in North Calcutta commenced in 1933. The noted sculptor, Gopeswar Pal was the first person to model the images of the Goddess, Her children, and Her other associates at his studio at Kumartuli. Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu, was the President of the *Kumartuli Sarbajanin Durga Puja Committee* for two successive years, viz., 1938 and 1939.[136]

The *Beniatola Sarbajanin Durgotsav* in North Calcutta was commenced in 1944 by two individuals, Anil Dutta and Biswanath Dutta, with a budget of one thousand rupees only.

The *Ahiritola Community Durga Puja* was launched in 1940 by Maniklal Saha and Shyam Saha, while the *Hatibagan Sarbajanin Durgotsav* in the Shyambazar area of North Calcutta commenced in the year 1936.[137]

Among some other North Calcutta Sarbajanin Durga Pujas with historical lineage, mention may be made of the following:—

(a) Nalini Sankar Street Sarbajanin Durgotsav, established in 1934.

(b) Paikpara Sarbajanin Durgotsav established in 1936.

(c) Haritaki Bagan Sarbajanin Durga Puja which commenced in 1936.[138]

Sarbajanin Durga Pujas in South Calcutta, like their counterparts in the northern areas of the city, may trace their origin to the first half of the twentieth century, if not earlier, and a reference to some of them are necessary for our study.

Among the most pre-eminent Sarbajanin Durga Pujas of South Calcutta were the following :—

(a) The Sarbajanin Durgotsav of the Manoharpukur Janasangha Club commonly known as the Matrimandir Club situated

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at Bepin Pal Road. This Puja commenced in 1927 under the aegis of Nirmal Chandra Mukherjee, Krishnaprasad Sen, Prasad Kumar Sen, Amulyadhon Das, Rampada Chatterjee and Amarnath Basu. Eminent personalities like Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, and noted historian, Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar, occasionally attended this particular Sarbajanin Puja.[139]

(b) The Adi Dakshin Kalikata Baroari Samity Sarbajanin Durgotsav, situated at Sitalatala in Rashbehari Avenue commenced in 1928, the first organisers being Bistupada Bhattacharyya, Satis Chandra Nath, Chintaharan and Bepin Behari Chakravarti, Mahendranath Ganguly, Pratap Chandra Guha Roy, Charu Chandra Chattopadhyay, Gobinda Bandopadhyay, etc.[140]

(c) The Kalighat Baroari Durgotsav, commonly designated as 22A Palli Puja, was first started in 1939 at Badamtala, Kalighat, by Santosh Kumar and Prannath Ganguly, Nirmal Kumar, Sailendra Kumar, and Surendranath Mukherjee, Bijoli Bhusan Ghose and Indubhusan Ganguly.[141]

(d) In 1939 was born the 23rd-Palli Sarbajanin Durgotsav at Harish Mukherjee Road in Bhowanipur. The first office bearers of the 23rd Palli Sarbajanin Durgotsav Samity who organised this community Puja were, Manindra Deb Roy, President, Kulada Ranjan Sengupta and Nitish Roy, Joint Secretaries, Samarendranath Mitra, Assistant Secretary, Kalipada Basu, Treasurer, followed by Bankimchandra Raychaudhuri and Phanindranath Mitra as ordinary members. The expenses incurred at the first Sarbajanin Puja were only a meagre Rs. 773,[142] a stark contrast to the huge expenditure incurred on such Pujas in present times.

(e) The Bakul Bagan Sarbajanin Durgotsav in Golmath at Bhowanipur, saw the light of day in 1928. The first organisers were Girish Chandra Ghose, President, Biseswar

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Bhattacharyya, Vice President, Surendranath Dutta, Secretary, Dr. Saila Mukherjee and Dr. Haritosh Banerjee, Joint Secretaries and the famous playwright, Tinkori Chakrabarti as Treasurer.[143]

The organisers of this particular Puja, however, could not agree among themselves over certain issues relating to the exact spot where the Puja was to be held alongwith other organisational matters. Thus, two separate Sarbajanin Pujas were simultaneously organised in the area, namely, the Bakul Bagan Sarbajanin Durgotsav and the Golmath Durga-puja Samiti Sarbajanin Durga Puja.

The prime organisers of the latter Sarbajanin included Haridas Ghosh, Kalipada Basu, Debendranath and Harendranath Mukherjee, Aukhoy Kumar Chatterjee, Ghanteshwar Bhattacharyya, etc.

A separate Sarbajanin Puja Committee was set up for the Bakul Bagan Sarbajanin Durgotsav among whom were, Nagendranath Banerjee, President, Prof. Kshetra Mohan Ghose, Secretary, Dr. Haritosh Banerjee, Assistant Secretary, and Gopal Chandra Dutta, Treasurer. The ordinary members included, Manibhushan Mukherjee, Lalit Mohan Basu, Sukumar Dutta, Apurba Nath, Kalipada Sarkar, Kirit Ghosh, Prakash Dutta, Dhirendranath Dutta, Lalit Mohan Mitra etc. This particular Sarbajanin Durga Puja was held on the ground of South Suburban Branch School situated in the area. The locale was shifted in 1966 to Bakul Bagan Road, away from the school grounds.[144]

(f) The *'Balligunge Pratisthan'* sponsored Sarbajanin Durgotsav held at a fixed podium, known as Durgabari, in Balligunge Place in South Calcutta, commenced in 1933 under the auspices of a Durga Puja Committee manned by Nirod Ray, Jiten Niyogi, Probodh Bagchi, Tarok Das, Nani Chaudhuri, Mohini Bhattacharyya, Jyoti Roy, Bireswar

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Gupta, Sacchidananda Bhattacharjee, Pasupati Datta, Bibhuti Majumdar and Bibhuti Chatterjee. The Puja is still held today with much glamour and ostentation.[145] Old Bhadralok families settled at this place were instrumental in conducting this particular community Puja.

(g) Among other South Calcutta Sarbajanin Durga Pujas in Balligunge, with historical antecedents, are the *Sarbajaner Durgotsav*, organised by the Padmapukur Baroari Samity, dating back to 1937, the *Maddox Square Sarbajanin Durgotsav* at 8, Ritchie Road in South Calcutta which commenced in 1936[146] and the *Balligunge Singhi Park Durgotsav* at Dover Road which was inaugurated in 1941.[147] The forties of the 20th century witnessed the inauguration of certain famous Sarbajanin Durga Pujas in South Calcutta. The most noted among them were the following :—

(h) The *Harish Park Sarbajanin Durgotsav* which started in 1940, under the auspices of the Harish Park Sarbajanin Durgotsav Samiti in that year.[148] The management of this particular Sarbajanin puja changed hands in 1946 with the Harish Park Byayam Samity taking charge.

(i) The Bhowanipur *'Sangha Mitra'* Sarbajanin Durga Puja commenced in 1944. The first organisers were Pankaj Ganguly, Kripanath Banerjee, Tarunendra Mohan Ghose, and Prafulla Sarkar. A musical soiree (Jalsa) was also organised by them which continues till present times and forms a theme for focal attraction.

(j) The Sarbajanin Durgotsav organised by the Mahapuja Samity at Ramesh Mitra Road, Southern Park was started in 1945, the first sponsor being Krishnakali Bhattacharyya.

(k) The Sarbajanin Durgotsav organised by *Muktadal* at Bhowanipur commenced in 1949.

(l) In 1946, the *Sanghasree Club* took charge of the *'Dakshin Kalikata Durgotsav'* at Kalighat. This Sarbajanin Durga

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Puja was established earlier by the Natun Sangha Club.[149]

(m) In 1946, again, a Sarbajanin Durga Puja was launched in South Calcutta by Forward Club, the first organisers being Dr. Chandi Das, Anathbandhu Sarkar, Biswanath and Baidyanath Mukherjee, Pratap Dev, and Uttamananda Sen.

(n) The famous *'Dakshin Palli Sarbajanin Durga Puja'*, organised by Mudiali Club was started in 1935 at S. R. Das Road, near Talligunge in South Calcutta. The Club celebrated the Golden Jubilee of this Sarbajanin Puja in 1984.

(o) The *Ekdalia Evergreen Club Sarbajanin Durga Puja*, which still steals the show from most community Puja in South Calcutta, commenced in 1944, as was the

(p) *Balligunge Deshapriya Park Sarbajanin Durgotsav.*

Besides the above, there were many other Sarbajanin Durga Pujas organised in various parts of the city and its suburbs during the first half of the twentieth century. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 21st October, 1947, furnishes a list of them. A detailed enumeration of these would tend to make our study extremely unwieldy, and so it would be be-fitting to refer only to a few among the hosts furnished by the newspaper. The main among them, worth mention, are respectively :—

(1) The Young Men's Sporting Association Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at Keshav Sen Street, North Calcutta.

(2) The Bengali Club sponsored, Indoor Sarbajanin Durga Puja, held at Brahma Samaj Road, Behala, in South Calcutta.

(3) The Park Circus Sarbajanin Durgotsav in Park Circus Maidan, South Calcutta.

(4) The Beniapukur Relief and Rehabilitation Committee Durga Puja, in South Calcutta.

(5) Badur Bagan Club Durga Puja, at 31 Badur Bagan Street, North Calcutta.

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(6) Behala Club Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at Behala in South Calcutta.
(7) Hatkhola Sarbajanin Durgotsav at 36, Shova Bazar Street, North Calcutta.
(8) Nilphamani Durga Puja Sarbajanin at Debinibas Colony, Dum Dum.
(9) Howrah Seva Sangha Sarbajanin Durga Puja and Exhibition. In 1947 the organisers celebrated the 18th Annual Sarbajanin Durgotsav.
(10) Bekar Bandhab Samiti Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at 17, Hara Chandra Mullick Street, Calcutta.
(11) Bonamalipur Sarbajanin Durgotsav at Jaynagar-Majilpur, a village situated some thirty miles from Calcutta.
(12) Manoharpukur Shakti Sangha Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at 11, Monoharpukur Road in South Calcutta.
(13) Uttarpara Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at Uttarpara, Hooghly, near Calcutta.
(14) Central Calcutta Byayam Samity Sarbajanin Durgotsav and Laxmi Puja, at 34, Wellington Street, Central Calcutta.
(15) Pahari Sangha Sarbajanin Durgotsav at Hari Nath Dey Road, in North Calcutta.
(16) Dakshin Palli Sarbajanin Durga Puja at 23, S. R. Das Road, in South Calcutta.
(17) Simla Sarbajanin Durga Puja at 47, Simla Street in North Calcutta.
(18) Bankul Sarbajanin Durgotsav, Bankul, Sibtolla, Howrah.
(19) Entally Sangha Sarbajanin Durga Puja, at Sambhu Babu Lane, in Central Calcutta.
(20) Adi Mahakali Patshala Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at 35, Kailash Bose Street, in North Calcutta.
(21) Purbachal Sarbajanin Durgotsav at Ramkrishnapur, Charghat.

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(22) The Trikone Park Sarbajanin Durga Puja held by Sarat Samity, in South Calcutta.
(23) Kashi Dutta Street Sarbajanin Durgotsav, organised in North Calcutta, by Kashi Dutta Street Sarbajanin Durgotsav Samity.
(24) The Vivekananda Sporting Club Sarbajanin Durga Puja organised by the above Club at 42, Simla Street, North Calcutta.
(25) The Young Mens' Association Sarbajanin Durgotsav at 76/2, Cornwallis Street, North Calcutta.
(26) Adi Kambuliatola and Shyambazar Street Sarbajanin Durga Puja by Bandhudal, situated at 128/1, Shyambazar Street, North Calcutta.
(27) Tapoban University Sarbajanin Durga Puja at Barisha, near Behala in South Calcutta.
(28) The Balligunge Sarbajanin Durgotsav at 22, Gariahat Road, in South Calcutta.
(29) Young Assembly Sarbajanin Durgotsav at Howrah.
(30) Kumartuli Sarbajanin Durgotsav, situated at 81, Sovabazar Street, North Calcutta.
(31) The Akal Bodhan Sangha Bhowanipur Sarbajanin Durgotsav held in 58/1, Kansaripara Road, Bhowanipur, South Calcutta.
(32) The Colootollah Sarbajanin Durga Puja held at Colootollah Street, Central Calcutta.
(33) The Bengal Chemical Quarters Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at 164, Maniktala Lane, North Calcutta.
(34) Beni Mandir Sarodotsav at 7, Darji Para Lane, in North Calcutta.
(35) The Lakeside Welfare Committee Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at Daudev Rahaman Road, Tallygunge, in South Calcutta.[150]
(36) The Sibpur Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at Pashupati Dutta Road, Shibpur, Howrah.

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(37) The Babu Bazar Sarbajanin Durga Puja, at Titagarh, near Calcutta.

(38) The Taltola Sarbajanin Durgotsav held at the European Asylum Lane in Central Calcutta.

(39) The Udayan Club Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at 1/1/5, Beni Nandan Street, Bhowanipur, in South Calcutta.

(40) The Khirertola Sarbajanin Durgotsav, held in Khirertola, Howrah.

(41) The 6-Palli Sarbajanin Durgotsav, held at Adwaita Mullick Lane, Calcutta.

(42) The Dakshin Kalikata Kalyan Samity Durga Puja, in Rani Shankari Lane, South Calcutta.

(43) The Khidderpur Sarbajanin Durgotsav held at Mansatala New Park, Khidderpur, in South Calcutta.

(44) Sikdarbagan Sarbajanin Durgotsav held at Sikdarbagan Street in North Calcutta.

and

(45) Seal's Garden Lane Sarbajanin Durga Puja, held at Cossipore in North Calcutta.

The same newspaper, of the same date, furnishes a separate news item on the forthcoming opening ceremony of the Burrabazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav launched by the Burrabazar Puja Samity in Central Calcutta. The opening ceremony was scheduled to be opened by the Honourable Revenue Minister, West Bengal, Mr. Kalipada Mukherjee on 27th October, 1947, at Satya Narayan Park (Nehru Park) in Burrabazar. This Puja was organised principally by local businessmen who had set up their shops and business establishments in that area and the inauguration of their Sarbajanin Durga Puja by the Revenue Minister was be-fitting to their professions.

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Part-VII

Puja Gaiety and Revelry

Gaiety and revelry marked the Durga Puja festivities in Calcutta and its suburbs. It was the time of the year which was eagerly awaited by one and all. While trains loaded with people arrived in the city from distant corners of the country to take part in the general bonhomie generated by the Pujas, trains left both Sealdah and Howrah Stations with Calcuttans seeking a holiday from the stresses of work and routine existence. Again, many denizens of the city working in far off places, eagerly, rushed to their native city to be re-united, even if for a very short time, with their near and dear ones. This feature is beautifully illustrated in an article entitled '*Puja Eve*' in the 24th September, 1944 edition of the Bengali daily, the Ananda Bazar Patrika. Yet again, a sizeable section of Calcutta's denizens, residing permanently in the city, chose not to desert it during this autumnal festive season, but to remain thither to enjoy the lights and sounds of Durgotsav, together with accompanying revelry and merriment. The festival witnessed a spontaneous outflow of powerful emotions among multitudes in the city and its suburbs—a release of pent-up emotions stiffled throughout the year by hard-work. This release was, indeed, wholesome and nourishing, filling up deep caverns in the minds of Bengalis and re-invigorating them for another whole year of work till the onset of the festival in the following year. The flow of traffic in the city streets increased on the occasion with the Calcutta Tramways issuing All-Day tickets at concessional rates to its customers. The traders had their share of joy flowing from increased sale of their stocks. Depicting the commercial transactions which brought satisfactory profit and resultant happiness among members of the trading community on the occasion, the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 17th October, 1947 reports :—

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"As usual, the traders reaped a rich harvest during this great Bengalis festival. The shops were awefully busy till the late hours at night even upto the last day of the Puja. The markets were over-crowded and shopkeepers tried to derive as good a bargain as they could. The prices of fish and vegetable went 50 percent, and in some cases 100 percent high. The markets were very thinly attended on Navami day, as owing to rain, petty dealers could not come from villages. Fish, therefore, became a rare commodity on that day and eggs and meat were in great demand."

The same issue, commenting upon the Puja euphoria in the city further quips :—

"The Sarbajanin Pujas have already become a speciality of Calcutta, and this year, too, popular enthusiasm was as seen as in previous years. Every section of the city had more than one image and this afforded the people an excellent opportunity of participating in the national festival."

Speaking of the efficiency of the police and voluntary organisations in controlling huge crowds at various Sarbajanin Puja podiums, the newspaper commented favourably on the services of the Calcutta Tramways which made excellent arrangements for the heavy traffic, although tram cars were generally always over-crowded on the occasion.

And despite the exodus of three lakhs people from the city during the 1947 Sarodotsav, Calcutta "did not suffer in the least in festive appearance."[151] Such was the Puja exuberance of the time. According to the Patrika of the same date it was worthwhile to stay in the city during the Puja to see it at its best.

The gaiety marking Durgotsav in the city and its suburbs seems to have withstood with comparative calm all vicissitudes of fortune. This was specially noticed during the Second World War (1939-1945). The Sarodotsav fervour, although toned down

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to some extent was not totally marred by fears of air-attacks or aerial bombardments. And although lighting restrictions during evenings and nights persisted in Calcutta and the mofussil areas to camouflage Puja revelry against aerial attacks, and although enhanced prices and strict rationing were enforced by the authorities to meet the exigencies of wartime situation, merriment and joy still laced the festival with a spirit of wanton exuberance. This is revealed from a close perusal of contemporary newspapers, particularly, the Amrita Bazar Patrika. Speaking on the spirit of gaiety, despite irksome restrictions, this newspaper, dated 27th September, 1941, reports thus :—

> "Be that as it may, we are happy to note that there is a general tendency to make the best of the present circumstances. Undaunted by lighting restrictions, enhanced prices and rationing petrol, shoppers, sightseers, and seasonal visitors to this city, are doing their bit to hold up the traditions of past Pujas. And judging from the brisk trade going on, the prestigious emporiums and departmental stores, as well as the countless one-man booths on the pavements, cannot have much ground for complaint."

And despite the spirit of austerity unleashed by the Government fanfare and ostentation marked most community Pujas which indulged in rivalry with one another in a bid to show-off their wealth and aesthetic potentials.[152]

Again, speaking of the general exodus from the city at this season, discerned from the huge crowds thronging the railway stations of Howrah and Sealdah, the newspaper compares the same to the evacuation of great cities, and analyses its cause to "a seasonal urge, sweeping, intense and perennial.[153]

> "Not even a bombing raid can create a greater exodus," quips the Patrika of the same date.

However, the Patrika fails to take into account the fact that the fear of bombing among many Calcuttans also contributed

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substantially to their desire to leave the city even if for a very short duration during the Durga Puja holidays.

Crowds swelled during the Mahastami evening in 1941 despite all the handicaps of the black-out. A considerable number of women were visible braving out the fears of an air raid. Of course, the Calcutta Corporation authorities to some extent relieved the situation by unmasking the lights at important street junction of the city.[154]

Although in 1941 Durga Puja celebrations were fittingly performed despite numerous restrictions and evening blackouts, and crowds swelled on the streets of Calcutta in immense numbers, the Sarodotsav was a drab affair on the following year. Evening blackouts were there as in the previous years what with fresh fears of Japanese air-raids. No illumination marked the numerous Ghats on the Ganges for facilitating the immersion ceremony, and immersion processions were not allowed to display lights, in accordance with strict Government orders. Despite this, the general public of the city celebrated the occasion with as much gaiety as they could muster; particularly on the Ashtami, Navami and Vijaya Dashami days. In other inter-war years, preceding and following 1942, the authorities cooperated as much as possible with the people vis-a-vis the Durgotsav rendering it more or less a success in the city and suburbs, but the *Quit India Movement* launched by Mahatma Gandhi and other Indian leaders in August, 1942, seems to have left an aura of ill-feeling for natives and their festivals in Government circles leading to a spirit of non-cooperation vis-a-vis the Durga Puja festival in Bengal.

Gaiety, although in a subdued note, in 1942, was manifest in the celebration of *Pankotsav* or mud-festival in different parts of the city on Vijaya Dashami day, marking the end of the Durga Puja. This is attested by a report featuring the October 26, 1942, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika which furnishes a humorous

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report of the same. The Pankotsav, according to the newspaper correspondent, was meant not so much for devotees as for young kids whose amusing feats dispelled the gloom of daily humdrum existence, particularly in the inter-war years. This particular Utsav consisted a unique feature of smearing an old person dressed in spotlessly clean clothes with mud. This generated great hilarity among all and sundry assembled to witness the scene, particularly among the mud-pelting kids on the occasion.[155]

The end of the Second World War marked an end to all wartime restrictions imposed on the Sarodotsav ceremony in Calcutta and the mofussil and people's joy, for this reason, knew no bounds. This is particularly featured in an editorial, captioned *'Season's Compliments'*, published in the 16th October, 1945, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika.

> "The Puja works miracles", quips the editorial. "After five years of dimmed, cheerless, and inadequate puja markets, Calcutta has once again seen floodlights, dressed shop windows, and happy night crowds in which colourfully dressed women and children are prominent."

The paucity of cloth which marked the inter-war years and plagued the public, both in Calcutta and the mofussil, during the Pujas, (owing to local and international restrictions on the trading of cloth), vanished all of a sudden with the termination of the war, and this phenomenon contributed much to the major spurt in garment buying in the festive season. A major factor behind this buying-spree was the fall in prices of goods in general. The Puja euphoria squeezed dry many a reckless buyer, even though the prices of goods had fallen considerably. The effect of this reckless buying and its negative consequences was beautifully standardised by the editor in the same editorial thus :—

> "A perfect fever of recklessness seizes him (viz., the Puja shopper). It is the one star period in the year when he must dress well, live well, and spend well, even if it means belt-

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tightening for the rest of the year."

And again, very poignantly :—

"The disapproval of solemn-faced economists and sad experiences of the past, notwithstanding, this odd streak of seasonal insouciance, persists in the minds of the small wage-earner, whose natural desire for good living is repressed all the year round by his knowledge of his poverty, until tradition and the intoxication of the autumn's weather conspire to blow off the lid of bottled-up wishes. Is it not better to be a king for a day and a slave for the rest of the time, than be uniformly miserable always?"

The editorial harps on the abundance of sweetmeats, fish, and vegetables, that filled the markets of Calcutta and the mofussil during the ongoing Durgotsav at far cheaper rates, despite the generally escalating cost of articles as a direct consequence of the Second World War which had just terminated.

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Part-VIII

Philanthrophy and Brotherhood during Durgotsav

A significant aspect of community or Sarbajanin Durga Pujas both in Calcutta and the mofussil was *Daridra Narayan Seva* or *Kangali Bhojan* resorted to by most of them. This concerned feeding of the poor, a custom borrowed from the affluent household Durga Pujas of yester-years. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 17th October, 1941, dwells on *Daridra Narayan Seva* organised by the Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav Committee members where 6000 poor folks were fed. *Daridra Narayan Seva* was also resorted to at Belur Math where Durgotsav was observed each year, as well as at the Ramkrishna Sarada Math near the city.[156] Again, at Katrasagar Panchgachi, in the mofussil, the local Sarbajanin Durgotsav Committee organised *Kangali Bhojan* accompanied by music and a theatrical function in 1941.[157]

Daridra Narayan Seva also witnessed the distribution of blankets and warm clothing to the poor as a protection from the cold during the forthcoming winter season. The custom was intended to foster a feeling of brotherhood among the rich and poor in the festive season. The food and warm clothing signified Ma Durga's gift to the poor and the lowly in Bengal.

The spirit of national unity, brotherhood, and philanthrophy towards the pedestrian classes found expression in contemporary newspaper articles as well as in the speeches of many orators in Durga Puja gatherings both in the city and in the suburbs. This is borne out from a close perusal of the files of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, particularly those of the inter-war years. Again, the egalitarian principles giving rise to brotherhood between rich and poor, the high and low, or the lofty and the pedestrian, for which the Goddess stood, was focussed in many writings and speeches of numerous Bengali stalwarts of the time. This, to

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some extent, fostered a spirit of national unity.

In an article entitled, *'Puja Eve'* penned by an anonymous correspondent in the 24th September, 1944 issue, of Amrita Bazar Patrika, the spirit of the egalitarian Mother Durga is well focussed.

> "We cannot claim our Mother to be our own", says the correspondent, "if we have not learnt that every human being is equal in Her eyes, that everyone under the sun has equal right to grow and use his/her faculties to the best advantage of society, and that there is no place on earth for exploitation and oppression."

The spirit of philanthropy towards the poor and the oppressed found expression at the Durga Puja celebrations organised by the Agarpara Jute Mills and the National Tobacco Company, in the suburbs of Calcutta, in 1944. Criticising the affluent Bengali Hindus for their stiff-necked attitude towards the poor which had so far acted as a major impediment to unity among the Bengalis, one Mr. N. R. Sarkar stressed the necessity of that unity in the individual and national life of Bengal. Because they had so far miserably failed to bring about that unity amongst themselves, Bengali Hindus were isolated like scattared outlets in the vast ocean of humanity. For ensuring a spirit of unity favourable conditions had to be created and affluent people had to be prepared to shake off their mental apathy towards the poor. The Durga Puja days offered them an excellent opportunity to prepare themselves in that way. Emphasising upon the egalitarian message of Durgotsav, Sarkar urged upon both rich and poor Bengalis to ease out fundamental differences among themselves, permanently, at the lap of Mother Durga, and fuse themselves in a spirit of love and brotherhood.

> "Just as the rainy season was the time for filling up rivers and tanks, so was the Puja the time for filling one's mind with universal love and fellowship," remarked Sarkar.

Mr. Sarkar further observed that the exhibition of splendour formed only a small part of the true Durga Puja celebrations. For

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a people stricken with famine, (Bengal Famine of 1943), want, and pestilence, such exhibitions of luxury and splendour were against a true spirit of worship. So Mr. Sarkar urged affluent Bengalis to remember those of their fellow men who belonged to the *"lower ladder of society"* and were immersed in squalor and poverty. Could the Mother, questioned Mr. Sarkar, ever forget the woes of Her poorer children amidst the splendour of Her more fortunate ones? The Puja would lose its true significance if affluent Bengalis failed to remember these unfortunate ones in the midst of universal joy and hilarity.[158] Pointing out the necessity of the humble factory labourer and the lowly agriculturist in the realm of economic regeneration and national reconstruction of the country, Sarkar highlighted their socio-economic importance to the nation. Economic regeneration and national reconstruction pre-supposed the interdependence of all classes in society, and thus the highly partisan attitude of the rich Bengalis towards the poor was best given up at a very short notice, he urged. As interdependence constituted the keynote of all economy, it was extremely necessary that harmonious relationship should exist between all component units which went to make up a stable economic structure, comprising the humble farmers and factory labourers on the one hand, and the rich mill-owners on the other.[159] In Sarkar's opinion, no particular section should exploit the other and nobody should endeavour to profit at the expense of the other. This was, also, in Sarkar's words, as much the task of social conscience as of the Government. Sarkar strongly called upon his audience at Agarpara to establish amity and fellowship between different sections of the people irrespective of social status, and to bring them together in order to prepare themselves for the task of reconstruction which awaited them. This, he stressed, was the message of Goddess Durga, who symbolised not only destruction but creation as well, and creation was almost analogous to national reconstruction and economic regeneration.[160]

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Part-IX

Puja Holidays and Information-Gathering Excursions

I have referred already to the general exodus from Calcutta witnessed during every Durga Puja celebration at two principal railway stations, viz., Sealdah and Howrah. Reference has also been made of the massive ingress into the city from outside by those Bengalis who worked far off from Calcutta and to whom the Durga Puja holidays presented the only opportunity of uniting with their near and dear ones once a year, and/or people from other states who came to the city to witness the Durgotsav celebrations in full force.

However, all those who moved away from the city on the occasion, did not do so as tourists *per se*. There were various information-gathering agencies in the city which provided prizes and other incentives to persons for moving away from Calcutta during Durgotsav to collect valuable information of places lying outside the city. One such agency was the *Bangiya Pradeshik Chatra Samsad* which in 1944 recruited a band of mofussil students to gather valuable data regarding their native districts and villages with their own views and impressions on the score. Prizes were promised for detailed information and good analysis of local problems and their remedies.[161]

Puja outings were not particularly directed towards places lying far away from Calcutta. Very often such outings took place within the city itself, or its immediate suburbs, the venues being usually the spacious garden houses of the wealthy. Such sojourns resembled picnics, but were not strictly speaking, picnics, the picnic season bring almost two to three months away. City outings involved large-scale gormandising and merry-making, and were attended by the high and mighty, including members of the British

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bureaucracy. A news item captioned 'Puja Outing', published in the September 25th, 1941, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, highlights one such outing. The news item is revealing as it not only furnishes the nature of entertainment that marked the garden party, but also gives the names of both the English and Indian stalwarts who attended the party which took the form of a Puja outing. According to the news item :—

> "The Alipore Civic Guards and ARP personnel had their Puja outing on Sunday, at the garden house of Mr. M. C. Law, at Jhowtallah Road, Ballygunge. About two hundred men and officers under the command of Mr. D. N. Sinha, Civic Guard Commandant, took part in an early morning route march from Alipore, accompanied by the Alipore Civic Guard Band. The day's programme was an attractive one and included *'Chota Hazri'*, swimming, lunch, fancy dress competition, community singing, concert, songs, indoor and outdoor games, and an excellent display of magic by a well-known magician. In the afternoon, the following had tea with Mr. B. N. Raychaudhuri, the District Commandant and Chief Warden, viz.,
>
> Mr. C. E. S. Fairweather, Commissioner of Police; Mr. P. Norton Jones, Deputy Commissioner, South District; Mr. K. P. Sovan, Deputy Commissioner, North District; Rai Bahadur P. N. Mukherjee; Mr. M. C. Law; and Mr. S. Banerjee attended."

Transport problems within Calcutta, during Durga Puja very often led to frayed tempers. Although the problem was not common every year, on some occasions it reached endemic proportions causing inconvenience and harrassment to the public. Inadequacy of buses leading to much bickering among Puja holidayers was focussed aptly in the September 25th, 1944, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika in an article captioned *'By The Way'*, where the correspondent comes down heavily on Government

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inaction on the matter.

In another article under the same caption, appearing three years later in the same newspaper, the issue of Puja holidays is ably discussed.[162] Puja holidays varied from person to person depending on the nature of their work. The month-long holiday during the Durga Puja in the nineteenth century was considerably curtailed in the case of Government employees in the second quarter of the first half of the twentieth century to twelve days. However, complications arose just after Independence when according to a Government circular, the number of Puja holidays was further reduced to ten, the Astami and Vijaya Dashami being declared as sectional holidays, only. This created quite a sensation in Bengali Hindu circles who objected to the order in a most vehement fashion. The situation was aggravated by the fact that whereas in previous years Muslims filled up gaps left by the Hindus, during Hindu festive holidays declared as sectional holidays in most Government offices, in 1947, i.e., after Independence and partition of the country, a large section of the Mohammedans hitherto in Government employ, had migrated to East Bengal, i.e., to East Pakistan, and Mohammedan employees could hardly be found to officiate during Hindu holidays declared as sectional holidays by Government. Hindus were up in arms against the Government order and a storm of protest erupted in West Bengal, forcing the authorities to declare the *Ashtami* and *Vijaya Dashami* days as holidays in the long run.

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Part-X

Durga Puja in 1947

The advent of Independence brought forth a surge of joy in the hearts of many nationalist-minded community Puja organisers in the city. For many years Calcutta had not witnessed the memorable scenes that were enacted during the four days of the Durga Puja, in 1947. There was a large increase in the number of Sarbajanin Pujas in the city and its suburbs and enormous crowds daily thronged these centres of attraction. Remarkable exhibitions of posters depicting different phases of India's arduous freedom struggle were a new feature of a large number of Sarbajanin Pujas. The Indian Union Tricolour Flag in profuse display greeted the eye everywhere and full-throated unity slogans raised from tens of thousands of people rent the sky during the festive occasion. Arches decorated with Indian flags and displaying the portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Poet Rabindranath Tagore were erected at some important street crossings of the city.[163]

We will now turn the hands of the clock back a bit, to assess public feelings during Durgotsav on three principal events prior to Independence, viz., the Second World War, the Bengal Famine of 1943, and the upsurge of communalism preceding the partition of India in 1947.

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Part-XI

Durga Puja and The Second World War

The Second World War fought between the Allied powers (represented by France, England, America and Russia) on the one hand, and the Axis forces (represented by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Japan) on the other, from 1939-1945, had a profound impact on Durga Puja celebrations in Bengal. With Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and a host of other nationalist leaders lending total moral support to England and her allies in their struggle against the forces of Fascism and Nazism, the programme of those nationalists who viewed the Goddess as the rallying point of anti-Government or anti-establishment dissidence was threatened to be jeopardised, and *Swaraj* seemed to be temporarily shelved till the conclusion of the War. Nonetheless, Mahatma's insistence on assisting Britain's war efforts against the Axis only after the attainment of full independence, and his subsequent call to the British in 1942 to quit India, emboldened the ultra-nationalists clamouring for *Swaraj* to continue with their programme of organising fiery speeches on the score from rostrums erected near Sarbajanin Durga Puja mandaps. The painful wartime restrictions concerning blackout and rationing during the Durgotsav festivities, considerably irked the Puja revellers. There followed a spurt of prayer-meetings directed to the Goddess urgently soliciting her intervention in terminating the War. Again, following in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, many a nationalist stalwart arranged meetings near Sarbajanin Durga Puja pandals where victory for the Allied Forces was eagerly invoked from the deity. Articles condemning Adolf Hitler and his Axis friends were published in the Puja issues of the Amrita Bazar

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Patrika, while editorials in the same issues very often invoked the Goddess to end both the Great War, as well as British rule in India. However, the desire for independence far out-weighed that of terminating the war, as the latter was only a recent phenomenon while the former was deeply embedded in Bengali hearts and minds from times gone by. Poems had been published in Puja-numbers of Bengali journals from a much earlier date describing the misery and deprivation of the country under colonial rule and hinting at an urge for its immediate extirpation.[164] I will quote one such poem published in the Saradiya number of the Ananda Bazar Patrika, dated September, 1935, which underplays the necessity of holding Durga Puja under conditions of deplorable destitution in colonial Bengal and hints, although in a veiled way, at the necessity of doing away with colonial rule in order to observe Durgotsav amidst the glories of freedom. The poem entitled, *'এবার হবে না পূজা'* or *'There will be no Puja this year'*, and written by one Jyotindra Mohan Bagchi, is symptomatic of the above feeling and reads thus :—

বরষা অন্ত শরৎ এল কি?
আবার কি দশভূজা
আসবেন ফিরে কাঙাল বঙ্গে?
এবারও কি হবে পূজা!
বোধনের ঘট ভরে ওঠে যেথা
রোদন-অশ্রু জলে,
সেই নোনা জলে শক্তিপূজার
আয়োজন—সে কি চলে?
কই ব্রাহ্মণ—কোথা ক্ষত্রিয়?
স্পশ্য কে হেথা আছে!
কার ছোঁয়া জল চালাইবে ভোগে
ফাঁকি দিয়া কার কাছে?

Nonetheless, the general craving for the speedy culmination

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of the Second World War, followed by universal Bengali condemnation of Adolf Hitler for starting the same was well evinced on the occasion.

Bengali disdain for the Second World War was profound, particularly because the War acted as a major deterrent to the spirit of gaiety during the Durga Puja. Astrology and Puja symbols were very often used to predict the periodical results of the War.

Thus, in 1940, the success of Nazi Germany in the Second World War was sought to be analysed in the light of Durga Puja symbols, in the 29th September issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. In a scathing editorial captioned, *'Sakti'*, Hitler's consultations with his astrologer vis-a-vis the success of his armies against his enemies is referred to. So far, according to the editorial, the predictions of the Fuhrer's astrologer had borne fruit as was seen by the uninterrupted success of Nazism in Europe, but an astrologer was, after all, a human being, and human beings were always apt to make mistakes, misjudgements, or miscalculations. The editorial ardently hoped for such a miscalculation on the part of Hitler's astrologer which might have portended defeat of his forces at Allied hands and the consequent relieving of the world from the nightmare of bloodshed and death that marked Europe in the 1940s. Referring to Goddess Durga's advent on Earth on an elephant *(Gaj)* and her departure on a *Dola* or swing, the editorial tries to assess their significance vis-a-vis the progress and outcome of the Second World War in 1940. According to the editorial although Goddess Durga's home-coming on an elephant portended good in the shape of bumper crops, Her departure on the *Dola*[165] was sure to be pregnant with sinister implications irrespective of whether Hitler won or lost the War. Durga's departure in a *Dola* or swing in 1940 signified tremendous loss of lives throughout the world due, not only to the War, but also due to a variety of adverse circumstances like the outbreak of epidemic diseases due to flood or drought.

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Dwelling upon the sinister consequences of the *Devi's* advent on a *Dola* in 1939, and her departure by the same conveyance in 1940, the same editorial asserts :—

> "Last year, about this time, prediction was made as the Goddess came on a *Dola*. The predictions have been fulfilled to the letter, and if the War spreads, which it is very likely to do, the carnage will be even more terrible than it has already been. Past experience tells us that a great war is almost always followed by the outbreak of epidemics like influenza, which again takes a terrible toll of human lives. Believe it or not, the stars do exercise profound influence over the affairs of man, if not animals as well. And one need not be a Hindu to believe in astrologers as a large crowd of Europeans at the places of some of the notable astrologers show. If Hitler is one of the believers, it does not lie in the mouth of his present enemies to ridicule him."

Describing Durga as the annihilator of evil, through physical prowess, the editorial hints bluntly at the ultimate destruction of Fascism and Nazism which had set in motion the spectre of cruelty followed by rampant misery in Europe. This destruction would be caused by the will of the Goddess Durga who signified the conquest of brute force that unleashed the vicious spectre of *"man's cruelty to man."*[166]

It was with an eye to Allied victory over Hitler that special prayers were offered to the Divine Mother during *Sarodotsav*. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, dated 20th September, 1941, refers to one such Puja that was conducted at Rassik Lal Biswas Lane, in Calcutta, by Rai Bahadur A. T. Ghose, Justice of Peace and District Commandant, Shyampukur, in that year. The Goddess was invoked during this Puja for the restoration of peace in the world through the speedy victory of Great Britain and her Allies over Hitler's hordes. Many distinguished dignitaries of the city

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both European and Indian attended the function which proclaimed their belief in Durga as the harbinger of peace and order in the world.[167]

The special Durga Puja ceremony held on 25th September, 1941, to appeal to the Goddess to stop the menace of the Second World War was an outcome of the general public outcry against the War in 1941, in Calcutta and the suburbs. Tempers were frayed due to numerous war-time restrictions imposed on the folks celebrating Durgotsav, in the shape of black-outs during night-times, rationing of petrol, along with the rising prices of commodities. Added to all these was the prevailing tension in the minds of the people vis-a-vis the outcome of the War. Tension led to thoughts on the fate of the following year's Puja in people's minds. The most fundamental questions that were uppermost in the people's minds were :—

(1) Under what conditions would the following year's Puja be held?

(2) Would there be less cause for anxiety—twelve months hence—so far as the fates of certain nations were concerned?

(3) Would the holocaust generated by the War assume within twelve months more terrible and devastating proportions compared to 1941?

These questions, reflective of the general public apprehension regarding the progress of the Second World War were published in a news-item captioned *'Speaking About The Puja'* in the September 27, 1941, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. To the correspondent, authoring this news-item, such questions were the products of useless speculations. However, according to the indications of the time, India of September, 1942 was destined to have many startling and novel experiences generated by the War.

Useless or useful, whatever they might have been, such

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apprehensions were usual among folks smarting under the impact of War. Try as one could, he or she failed to detach his or her mind from all thoughts of War even on this festive occasion. All allurements offered by Durgotsav seemed, despite the general gaiety generated by the occasion, to melt away in an uncanny fashion, in the vast ocean of anxiety and apprehension created by the deluge of the Second World War.[168] This feature was particularly noticeable, at least in the first day of the Durga Puja celebrations in Calcutta in 1941, which, compared to the previous year, was marked by "less gaiety and spirit of festivity."[169]

Despite universal support for the Allies in the War, there were exceptions in people who, while condemning Nazi aggression, were also highly critical of the policies of the Allied powers. An editorial to this effect appeared in the 29th September, 1944, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. The editorial castigated the Allies for their questionable colonial policies which proved highly detrimental for the people of their subject nations. The aim of the editorial was to expose the innate hypocrisy of the powers who aligned against Hitler's hordes on moral grounds while being themselves steeped in immorality and repaciousness when dealing with their own colonial subjects. The repression perpetrated on their colonial subjects, according to the editorial, could one day boomerang against them with the subject nations taking up arms against colonial oppression and initiating a bloody struggle for independence. This was already manifest in India, (viz., with the growth of militant nationalism in the country), and other subject nations could emulate, according to the editorial, the Indian example sooner or later and give clarion calls for independence. As regards the outcome of the Second World War the editorial also takes a critical view. Although conceding that Allied victory against the Axis forces was in sight the editorial notes that there would always prevail in the minds of the victors the lurking fear of the vanquished enemies recouping themselves and throwing

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the world again into the boiling cauldron of another Armageddon. Characterising the Second World War as more of a psychological rather than a physical phenomenon with its roots embedded in the minds of men, the editorial holds that so long as greed, lust, jealousy and other provocative causes existed in the minds of men, there could never be a total termination of war. The League of Nations, established after the conclusion of the First World War (1914-1918), could not prevent the recurrence of war in the world as it was not based on the principles of righteousness and truth which were the cardinal imperatives for the eradication of conflict from the face of the Earth. Thus, according to the editorial, the much aspired after Allied victory over the Axis nations could, at best, be a sort of "pyrrhic victory" but not a victory epitomised by the concept of *'Vijay'* intrinsically intertwined into the Durga Puja celebrations of the time, which could usher into the world true *'Ramrajya'*, and which would see the total effacement of lust and greed that brought forth war, and ensuing disorder and chaos in the world.

> "May the spirit of righteousness replace the malignant one of *'holding our own'*, that has been at the bottom of all wars", quips the editorial.[170]

The Second World War petered out with victory for the Allies and the defeat and destruction of Nazism and Fascism. The year was 1945. The prayers of the people to the Goddess Durga were answered positively, at last, with the triumph of justice over the forces of evil. Just as in the Puranas, Devi Durga is shown as manifesting Herself as the result of the most intent effort of will on the part of the Suras, so also it was the intense will-power of the progressive mind of the world that destroyed the terrible power of Fascism in a bloody conflict. This analogy was wonderfully stressed in another brilliant editorial which was published in the 21st October, 1947, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika.[171] And in the words of the same editorial, it was the

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same will-power of the Indian masses that brought freedom to the country on 15th August, 1947.[172] This will-power was the direct corollary of the people's passionate prayers to the Goddess.

The First World War did not concern Indians, particularly nationalist Indians, so much as the Second World War. And so the spirit of Goddess Durga was rarely invoked during its tenure, viz., from 1914 to 1918. So the connexion between the deity and the First World War rarely featured as a focal theme for publication in any newspaper or journal of the times. It was the Second World War together with the universal cry for a free and independent India that made nationalist and anti-war minded newspapers like the Amrita Bazar Patrika draw a subtle connection between the idealism fostered by the Durga Puja and those drawn from the twin-principles of freeing the world of Fascist aggression and that of freeing India from British rule. Socio-political issues like the Second World War, the independence of the country, the Bengal Famine of 1943, and the spurt of communalism in Bengal—all these phenomenas could be linked one way or another with Durga and this was done in a masterly fashion by the Amrita Bazar Patrika, a newspaper deeply sympathetic to the cause of nationalism and national regeneration in India. This, in a sense, explains the paper's detailed focus on the Sarodotsav and its significance in the socio-political context of the nation in the 1940s. Earlier, the apprehension of a massive world war was reflected in the Saradiya number of the Ananda Bazar Patrika of 1938 (B. S. Aswin 1345). In an article entitled *'Bhabi Pujarir Dal'*, published in the 6th Aswin, 1345, issue of the newspaper, one Prathyagathananda, highlighted the rapid mobilisation of troops in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and the Soviet Union which was a prelude to a world crisis of no mean proportion. The article invoked Mother Durga to instil a spirit of rationality in the minds of the leaders of those militarising nations, which would detract them from the path of a devastating world war.

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History, however, showed how unconcerned the Goddess was to such an appeal.

Possibly, Devi Durga wanted total annihilation of the leaders of these militarised nations through war, as She had destroyed Mahisasura and his minions in conflict. The spirit of Shakti which She embodied demanded liquidation of evil through bloody altercation and not through persuasion or self-introspection leading to the relinquishment of militarisation.

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Part-XII

The Bengal Famine of 1943 and The Durga Puja

The destitution and misery which stalked Bengal in the 1930s following socio-political disruptions and natural calamities was well focussed in the Durga Puja issues of two contemporary daily newspapers, one Bengali and the other English, viz., *the Ananda Bazar Patrika* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika.* The focussing came in the form of a veiled protest to the Goddess for doing nothing specific to rectify the miserable plight of the Bengalis smarting under deprivation and exploitation of foreign rule. The protest was registered through poetry and prose published in these newspapers. While certain critics in these papers constantly harped on the redundancy and illogicity of celebrating Durgotsav amidst these trying circumstances, others traced Durga's unfeelingness to the lack of spontaneity in the prayers offered by the Bengalis to the Goddess. Prayers of invocations had, according to these critics, become mechanical and this had infuriated the Goddess and motivated Her to do nothing to dispel the all-pervasive depression from Bengali minds. This second line of thinking found candid expression in an editorial captioned *"Agamani"*, published in the 14th October, 1936, issue of the Ananda Bazar Patrika.

The editorial, dwelling on the general poverty and destitution in Bengal under foreign rule, pinpoints to the declining social prestige of the province which had reached an all-time low both within the country and abroad. The ever-increasing spectre of poverty threatened the very foundations of Bengali social fabrics with cries of want and starvation rupturing the serene placidity of almost all Bengali homes. These, according to the editorial, did not signify the Mother's blessings on the Bengali multitude.

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On the contrary, these were symptomatic of Durga's curse on the people of Bengal expressive of Her anger at their crass artificiality in invoking Her. In the analysis of the editorial, what the Goddess greedily demanded from Her devotees was devotion *per se*, and prayers or supplications to Her devoid of devotion were never answered. What, in the opinion of the editorial, the Bengalis in the thirties of the twentieth century particularly lacked was genuine devotion towards the Goddess thereby rendering their prayers totally artificial, a phenomenon which had invited Her wrath, disdain, and unfeelingness towards their plight. Thus, Devi Durga, in the context of the socio-economic and political conditions of the time, had become almost synonymous to death and destruction brought about in the province by natural calamities like floods, drought, famine and general pestilence. The Goddess in the 1930s was thus not representative of a spirit of regeneration from doom for which She actually stood. And until Bengalis changed themselves there was no need for celebrating Durgotsav, quipped the above editorial.

Almost similar sentiments were echoed two years later by an article in the same newspaper dated B. S. 6th Aswin, 1340. The article entitled *'Bhabi Pujarir Dal'* and authored by one *Pratyagathananda*, laments the pathetic conditions in Bengal caused by famine, flood and general penury, under British misrule, and blames the Bengalis for their crass artificiality in the matters of worship to the Goddess. This, according to the article, was one of the principal causes for their plight. Again, foreign rule, with consequent drain of wealth to England, had rendered the country sick, and without power to sustain natural calamities like famine or drought as of yore. What confronted the nation at large and Bengal in particular was the spectre of a defeated Mother, a Durga defeated by the vast hordes of Asuras signified by the rapacity and repression of foreign rule. Where these should have been vanquished by Durga, these now were vanquishing

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the Devi. What was imperative for Bengalis in this hour of crisis was the shedding of all artificialities vis-a-vis their worship to the Goddess and their adoption of the principle of supplicating to Her in right earnest so as to persuade Her to rid Bengal of the miseries of foreign rule which had rendered the nation profoundly weak and unhealthy. Only then would the Divine Mother assume Her true prowess to vanquish the Asuras of disorder and distress which stalked the nation. It would be then and then only that natural calamities would cease to un-nerve the country. The article ends with a poignant note by calling upon Bengalis to shed their cowardice and live up boldly to the necessities of the time.

An editorial in the same issue of the newspaper castigates Bengalis for almost forgetting the eternal Mother, and places the causes of all their woes at the door of such forgetfulness. Unlike former times, Bengalis in the thirties of the twentieth century, were paying mere lip-service to the worship of Durga, and this had caused deep anguish to brew in the Devi's heart. The Mother was, in the opinion of the editorial, disinterested in the way in which Bengalis had reduced Her autumnal worship into a mere unfeeling yearly routine. Rather, She had become highly incensed at this attitude towards Her and had cursed them for the same. The curse had taken the form of systematic repression under foreign rule, coupled with monstrous natural calamities that took a heavy toll of human life and property. Bengalis, in the words of the editorial, had been rendered weak owing to this curse, so weak as to be subjected to kicks and other forms of indignities by their alien masters without the mental stamina to protest.[173]

Contemporary poems, published in the Ananda Bazar Patrika of the 1930s were found very often to harp on the same theme. A poem, entitled 'Agamani', written by one Ramendu Dutta, and published in the B. S. 6th Aswin, 1345, issue of the Ananda Bazar Patrika highlights the incidence of famine, plague, unemployment, and general pestilence amidst the spectre of

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general poverty in Bengal and directly takes Devi Durga to task for not alleviating general distress generated by these malevolent phenomenas. In the powerful language of the poem :—

তোমার দুলাল হইয়া জননী
ক্ষীর-সর-ননী থাকুক দূরে
ক্ষুধা আর পিলে উদরেতে মিলে
দিয়েছে তুর্কী নৃত্য জুড়ে!
ত্রিশ কোটি তব হাড়-বের-করা
দুখে নিরাশায় জীবন্তে-মরা
সন্তান দেবী, আর দদ্ধিতে
কেন আসা এই মর্ত্যপুরে,
মা-মরা ছেলের দশা হেরে যদি
মা, তব নয়ন নাহিক ঝুরে?

অকাল-বোধনে এসেছিলে শুনি,
আজ কেন তবে সাড়া না পাই,
এর চেয়ে আর অকাল কবে যে হবে,
বসে বসে ভাবি গো তাই।
ভক্ত তোমার সন্তান যারা,
হিন্দু বলিয়া লাজে ভয় সারা,
বিশেষে বাঙ্গালী পূজারী তোমার
কাঙ্গালী হইতে দেরি ত নাই!
বাঙ্গলায় তার রুজি মেলা ভার
বিহারেও আর মিলে না ঠাঁই।।

বহু দিন ধরি বরসে বরসে
এই চারি দিন হরষে মাতি
কাটায়েছি যত কষ্টের দিন

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দীপহীন অমা-তিমির-রাতি!
ধৈর্য্যের, মাগো, আছে জেনো সীমা
নেহাৎ নিরেট গবেটও নহি মা,
ভুলায়ে ভুলায়ে কতদিন আর
ফুলায় রাখি এ শীর্ণ ছাতি!
ট্যাঁকে নেই টাকা, পাশ বই ফাঁকা,
পূজায় কেমনে হরষে মাতি।।

The poem is reflective of general despondency that pervaded Bengali ranks in this period owing to the factors referred to above. Even the celebration of Sarodotsav or Durgotsav under the circumstances seemed both redundant and costly. The veiled criticism of Devi Durga for not changing the situation for the better for the cash-strapped Bengalis at this time is evident from the biting sarcasm and satirical note of the poem.

A similar poem entitled *'Durgotsav'*, by one Mohitlal Mazumdar, published in the 14th October, 1934, (viz., B. S. 28th Aswin, 1343), Saradiya issue of the Ananda Bazar Patrika, depicts an identical picture of poverty and depression in Bengal, making it redundant and virtually useless to hold a costly ritual like the Durga Puja on that year. The poem vividly describes the all-round mental depression flowing from general penury among Bengali folks smarting under colonial oppression and natural disasters which had succeeded in converting Durgotsav from a festival of joy to one of doom. The poem which merits quotation is as follows :—

(১)

"নাহি বাদ্য কোলাহল জনতা-গুঞ্জন,
সহাস্য আননে নাই, শাস্ত্র-আলাপন,
নীরব মণ্ডপে বসি' জন দুই-চার
চেয়ে আছে শূন্যদৃষ্টি সমুখে প্রসারি।

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শীর্ণ দেহ ম্লান মুখ—পুরোহিত বুঝি'।
কাষায়-বসনে বসে আছে চোখ বুজে।
সব যেন শূন্য রিক্ত, আঁধার আঁধার—
তারি মাঝে জ্বলে তবু মুখ প্রতিমার!
সোনার দেউল যেন শ্মশানের বুকে,
মলন দীপের ভাতি রোগপাণ্ডু মুখে।
সধবার গঙ্গাযাত্রা—শাড়ী ও সিঁদুর উজ্জ্বল শোকের
ছবি! — হৃদয় বিধুর। 'কাজ নাই—ভেঙ্গে ফেল' করিব না
পূজা—জলদে বিদ্যুৎ-হাসি—ওই দশভুজা।

(২)

নহে সত্য, স্বপনের অলীক প্রতিমা!
বৃথা পূজা, বৃথা মন্ত্র, বৃথা সে বোধন!
ও রূপে হবে না আর সে যজ্ঞ সাধন—
এ শরতে আনিবে যা' নূতন নীলিমা
ওযে শুধু শোক-স্মৃতি নাহি যার সীমা,
অলস অবশ হয় অবসন্ন মন,—
মৃতের শয্যার পাশে বিফল ক্রন্দন!
সনিশ্বাস স্মরণের অতীত মহিমা।
এ বঙ্গ সে বঙ্গ নাই, সমাজ সংসার
চিরপথে অন্য পথে দাঁড়ায়েছে আসি
মহাকাল ধ্বংসরূপ ধার আর বার
নূতন করিতে চায় পুরাতন গ্রাসী।
কে দাঁড়াবে মহামন্ত্র ঋক্ সমুচ্চারি'—
কে পড়িবে নবদুর্গা দুর্গতি নিবারি'?

It is in the light of the above socio-economic conditions prevailing in Bengal in the thirties and early forties of the twentieth century that the Bengal Famine of 1943 and its connection with the Durga Puja festival must be explored. The Famine evoked a desire in some Bengali hearts to strive for the

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attainment of that *Shakti* or power which epitomised the person of the Goddess and which was necessary to do away with evil and oppression on all fronts. Evils in the shape of natural calamities and general poverty flowing from colonial misrule had raised their ugly heads all over the province and the man-made Bengal Famine of 1943, caused by massive diversion of food-stocks from the province to feed Allied soldiers on the Second World War fronts, was the last straw in the hat of the already suffering and cornered Bengalis. With the spectacle of famished folks dying daily by thousands either in the countryside or in towns and cities, the Bengali morale was visibly shaken. Nationalist forums became rife with anti-Government and anti-colonial diatribes and clamoured for total independence which was, to them, the only viable way of ridding the province of this man-made menace designed practically to suit the interests of the colonial powers engaged in a deadly conflict with their Axis opponents.

Not only was Goddess Durga repeatedly invoked to put an end to the spectacle of death and despair brought about by the Famine, but Her power was solicited on a grandiose scale so that the Bengalis could rise en-masse against the foreign rulers who had forced the crisis down the Bengali gullet. The Amrita Bazar Patrika was particularly vocal in this respect and its articles in its Durga Puja issues were vociferous in their appeals to the Goddess to retrieve the morbid situation. Some even invoked Her for getting at least a part of Her strength and power to contest the bickering phenomenon of want and starvation brought about by the Famine.

One particular editorial, entitled *'Agamani'*, published in the newspaper, dated 5th of October, 1943, is explicit with such invocation and betrays a strong nationalist urge to do away with the principal source of the tragedy symbolised by foreign rule and colonial extortion.

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The editorial draws public attention to the crisis brought about by the Famine and tries to convince its readers of the gravity of the situation.

> "India lies helpless and prostrate today", emphasises the editorial. "She has lost all freedom of action or will. The spectacle of grim death stares her in the face. The wail of the dead and the dying fills the air. Emaciated skeletons move slowly in processions towards the burning-ghats, only to rot there in heaps. Is all this but a shadow of coming events still more terrible?"

Exhorting Devi Durga to extricate Bengal from the throes of misery, starvation and death, the editorial enumerates :—

> "Spare us this ghostly sight, O Mother Divine, and inspire us with the confidence and courage that saves. Long have outworn forms and dead rituals passed with her (viz., India) for religion. Put us today in contact with truth that frees and invigorates. Long have we been trampled upon, and long have we grovelled in the dust. Inspire us, Mother, with the vision of a new life and a new freedom. Come, O Mother, Come!"

While describing the plight of Bengal reeling under the impact of the Famine, the editorial does not hide its nationalist bias when it dwells on the ignominies heaped on the nation by its colonial masters, especially when it appeals to Goddess Durga to bring about the emancipation of the country from foreign rule. The poignancy of the language of the editorial is highly revealing of the spontaneous desire of its writer to usher in the hallowed benefits of independence leading to the elimination of calamities like the artificial man-made Bengal Famine of 1943.

The gravity of the situation ushered in by the Famine and the implicit faith reposed by the suffering multitudes on Goddess Durga as the only effective panacea for their ills, was not only a theme for editorials or articles in the Amrita Bazar Patrika.

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Vijaya greetings of many commercial houses published in that newspaper were frequently found to refer to the same. It would be worthwhile to bring to the reader's notice, few such Vijaya greetings, which were published in the Patrika as advertisements of various commercial houses in Calcutta.

On the 9th of October, 1943, the Amrita Bazar Patrika published three such Vijaya greetings. The first, issued by Mr. N. B. Ghose Dastidar, the Managing Director of the India Exchange Bank, situated at Calcutta, carried these words :—

> "On this day of National Unity we offer our prayers for the termination of the woes of starving Bengal through easy flow of wealth and offer."

The second advertisement issued by Manindra Nath Vaishya Saha, the proprietor of Santosh Biscuits Company, Calcutta, contain the following lines descriptive of the calamity, viz. :—

> "On this auspicious Bijaya, *we stick to our ground even amidst the greatest calamity of Bengal* and offer our sincere good wishes for the prosperity of our numerous clients, patrons and friends."

In the third advertisement issued by *Himkalyan Works* of Calcutta, allusion to the Famine is explicit, thus :—

> "Bijoya Greetings to all our constituents, patrons and well wishers, and on this very happy occasion *we pray to Devi Durga that Her blessed invisible hands dispel the darkest calamities that have be-fallen us all*, so that the life of the nation becomes imbued with new hope and new energy."

Here, reference to the Goddess as the would-be dispeller of Bengal's woes brought about by the Famine and other calamities flowing from foreign rule is well illustrated and brings out the advertiser's faith in Her miraculous abilities.

The fourth advertisement was inserted in the 11th October, 1943, issue of the Patrika by B. Mukherjee, the Managing Director of *Darjeeling Bank, Calcutta,* who, while wishing the Bank's

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customers a *'Happy Bijoya'*, made a pointed reference to the calamities set afoot by the Famine and the rising spurt of Hindu-Muslim antagonism in Bengal that threatened to rupture the province into two. In the words of this advertisement :—

> "Our Bijoya Greetings,
>
> To those who have helped this institution to exert its best for the cause of the general public in *these storm-tossed days of lacerated Bengal.*"

These advertisements display the visible concern manifested by the commercial houses about the fate of Bengal reeling under the impact of the Famine and other incidental causes. They are expressive of the sense of oneness felt by these commercial organisations with the suffering millions in the province.

The Bengal Famine of 1943 thus effected a profound impression on the Bengali psyche. The fear of impending doom generated by this vicious phenomena, which made Bengalis invoke Durga for alleviation of distress, continued in their minds long after the termination of this woeful episode. For in an editorial entitled *"Come, O Mother, Come"*, published in the 21st October, 1947, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, i.e., after four years from the odious days of 1943, the fear of famine was described as ever present on the social and political horizon, which threatened to jeopardise the existence of the free state of India. From this plight only Mother Durga, according to the editorial, could deliver the nation.

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Part-XIII

Vijaya

Vijaya Dasami marks the culmination of Durga Puja. Although the day marks the celebration of victory of Ramachandra over Ravana, the King of Sri Lanka, and the Kshatriya Kings of yore commenced their military enterprises on this auspicious day with the belief that they would be crowned with success[174], yet for the Bengali mind the occasion is one of profound sorrow for it signifies the departure of Goddess Durga to her celestial abode.

The noted poet laureate of nineteenth century Bengal, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, bemoaning the departure of Devi Durga for her celestial abode on Vijaya Dashami day, ardently wished that the night of the Mahanavami would linger for ever. His wish was epitomised in a sonnet in Bengali, an English rendering of which has been thus furnished by Nirad C. Chaudhuri, in his internationally acclaimed book *'The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian'* :

"Depart not with thy stars, O Night!
For a Mother's life will pass with thee;
The stern sun's rise shall signal be
For these eyes to lose their light.
A year's tears, drear and blind of sight,
As her coming's price were shed by me.
The glad days yet I want but three,
Thy starry braid shall fade to leave a blight.
Silver voice and lustrous lamps of gold,
Banishing darkness, thawing silence cold,
In my palaces light and music made
But the ninth moon sinking leaves to me
Double gloom and parting's depthless sea
—The Spouse of the Mountain, sighing said."

The sonnet is reflective of the general Hindu Bengali mood

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of gloom and wanton disdain at the impending departure of the Goddess for Kailash. The pall of gloom is also the by-product of Bengali allergy at the prospect of returning to humdrum routine existence after Vijaya Dashami, marking the termination of Sarodotsav or Durgotsav in Bengal. The sonnet is evocative of strong emotions flowing from the pen of the renowned poet.

The images of the deity are immersed on this day along with those of her four children. The Puja mandap or podium, which during the three days of worship, had been a scene of boundless joy, looks pale, gloomy and deserted on this particular day as the hour of immersion of the divine image draws near. The men and women who gather in the Puja pandals to have a last glimpse of the Mother are seized with an overwhelming sense of sorrow. The ladies taking part in the farewell ceremony burst into tears while anointing each other with vermilion taken from the forehead of Durga's image.[175]

> "The radiant smile seems to fade from the lips of the Mother Herself as if She feels the pangs of separation", recalls an editorial in the 2nd October, 1941, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. '"Forget us not, O Mother', whisper the ladies into Her ear, 'and fail not to come next year'."[176]

The men then carry the image to the riverside with heavy hearts for immersion. Although sorrowful hearts bid a tearful farewell to the Goddess, Her immersion ceremony is neither marked by self-abnegation nor total sobriety. Multiple crowds gather on the river banks to witness the immersion ceremony which is performed with much fanfare and ostentation.

Gaudily coloured boats carry the images to the middle of the rivers or lakes where they are immersed amidst the bursting of crackers and the beating of drums. The banks of the rivers or lakes, chosen for immersion, are well illuminated and the frenzy of the crowds often break the barriers of order and peace. Of course, illuminations on river-banks were restricted during the

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Second World War years, viz., 1939-45, as a precaution against air-raids. The ceremony, which was well portrayed in Kaliprasanna Sinha's inimitable book *'Hutum Penchar Naksha'* or *'Sketches from Hutum'* written in the nineteenth century, was back in focus in contemporary newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in the Amrita Bazar Patrika of the times. The Patrika, reporting on the Vijaya ceremony in Calcutta in 1947, seemed to have felt the pulse of the multitude who accompanied Vijaya processions to the riverside. In the words of the reportage :—

> "The day shone brilliantly on Friday, viz., the Vijaya Dasami day, and people were delighted to feel that they would heartily join the farewell of the Divine Mother. The streets, again, became animated with heavy traffic and by evening the city assumed a gorgeous appearance with the music of innumerable processions wending their way with images through crowded routes to the river-side. Rich and poor, old and young, men and women were out in their best to participate in the last function of this annual festival."[177]

The same issue of this newspaper also furnishes a scintillating description of Durga immersions during Vijaya Dashami at Ranaghat in Nadia, in the Churni river. The town had twenty Pujas to its credit, one of which was a *'Sarbajanin'* or community Puja, organised by one Narendra Nath Banerjee. In the evening on Vijaya Dashami day all the images were conducted with processions to the bank of the Churni river in right religious style and were placed duly on boats which were decorated tastefully with flags, festoons and flowers. This system was introduced here for the first time by the late Ishwar Chandra Pal Chaudhuri, the eldest son of the late Krishna Chandra Pal Chaudhuri, the scion of the famous Pal Chaudhuri family of Ranaghat. More than 25,000 people assembled from different

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neighbouring villages to witness the Vijaya. During the actual immersion ceremony, all the images were taken on carriages, beautifully illuminated and decorated, to the different ghats thronged by thousands of spectators in gala attire. What especially attracted public attention were the beautifully arranged and gaudily illuminated boats of the Pal Chaudhuri's and the De Chaudhuris which resembled *"a profusely illuminated floating pavilion"*. Beautiful lighting arrangements were also made on the occasion at various ghats by the Ranaghat Municipality.

The riverside rampage on the water-front on the occasion of Devi Durga's immersion was indeed a very colourful affair, but equally colourful was the bonhomie generated during the reunion ceremony of the Hindus immediately after the immersion. Enumerating the feeling that captivated the hearts of the Hindus in general, an editorial entitled *'Day of Victory'*, published in the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 2nd October, 1941, recalls thus :—

> "They feel as they had never felt before, that, inspite of the diverse interests, real and imaginary, which separate them here on earth, they are all united together by an invisible bond, that they all live and move on the lap of the common Mother and that they are flesh of Her flesh and bone of Her bone."

On this auspicious occasion Bengali folks fall on each others' neck and clasp each other in loving embrace. For once in a year all distinctions between high and low, the rich and the poor, the high-caste and the out-caste, are clean forgotten and all outstanding quarrels are buried for the time being. Sworn enemies forget and forgive. Cooling friendships grow warm. The memory of the common *Mother* whom all Bengalis worship inspire in them a deep belief that the sense of their separate existence is but a vain conceit and a silly illusion, and that they are, after all, but *"different facets of one universal reality."*[178]

The spirit of bonhomie during Vijaya Dashami is also reflected,

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although in a humorous tone, by one *Vijayavinandan* in an article captioned *'Vijaya Greetings : A Day of Reunion'*, which was published in the 2nd October, 1941, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. Referring to the spirit of love and brotherhood generated on the occasion the article quips :—

> "It is a day on which every one of us banishes all hostile sentiments and extends greetings to all and sundry. The man who has been avoided these 364 days is greeted with customary embrace, and stuffed with sweets and rich dishes. Everyone seems to revel in the warm stream of sympathy that enlivens the atmosphere."

Vijaya Dashami is portrayed with palpable humour, not without an iota of cynicism.

Vijayavinandan refers to a great military rally organised on the occasion of Vijaya after which a certain general developed rheumatism of the palm caused by the incessant shaking of hands with thousands of soldiers. Although Vijayavinandan does not specify the exact date or place of the occurrence the event is reflective of the physical after-effects of affectionate physical behaviour generated on the occasion.

The act of embracing resorted to by Hindus on or after, Vijaya Dashami has been singled out by the author for caustic humour. Vijayavinandan points to the difficulty encountered by two very fat men who want to embrace on the occasion, with their rotund tummies acting as constant impediments to the act.[179] Likewise the great difficulty evinced by two individuals, one extremely tall, while the other excessively short in height, in embracing during Vijaya, with the short man trying in vain to reach the shoulders of his taller counterpart, while the latter being forced to stoop down to return the embrace, has been humorously compared by Vijayavinandan with the *"case of the tall palm bending down to the clinging vine."*

Vijayavinandan also speaks of the salutary *'Pronam'* resorted

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to by the young on the occasion consisting of taking dust of the feet of elders with the latters' reciprocal gesture of *'Ashirbad'* or blessing the young by the placing of hands on the youngsters' heads. In a note of caustic humour, Vijayavinandan refers to the foul body odours released on the occasion of Vijaya greetings and humorously enlightens his readers on a person who advised his friends and relatives to undergo thorough deodorisation during Vijaya as a check to the emission of foul bodily smells emanating from sweating and other incidental causes.

Vijayavinandan also speaks of the prevalence of swindlers or pick-pockets who relieve people of their purses while they are busy greeting one-another during Vijaya.

The concept of Vijaya was focussed in numerous articles in the Amrita Bazar Patrika, and its relationship with the independence of the country from foreign rule was stressed.

According to an editorial, entitled *'Vijaya'*, published in the 8th October, 1946, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, the true import of the term *'Vijaya'* was sought to be assessed with great analytical insight. Although the event witnessed the celebration of Ramchandra's victory over Ravana's hordes, outwardly, it had, in the opinion of the above editorial, three basic metaphysical attributes featured below, viz. :—

(1) Vijaya is the celebration to mark the victory of the human soul over base animal passions that exist and rule over human minds on several occasions.
(2) It represents the victory of knowledge over ignorance, and of the forces of good over those of evil.
(3) It also marks that triumph of all that is God-like in men over all that is demonic.

These three attributes cannot be achieved very easily, and yet they had to be achieved, for therein lay the fundamental key to the happiness of man. One of the chief ingredients of such happiness was social and political freedom, and numerous articles

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on Vijaya in the Patrika abound with the necessity of achieving such freedom. This newspaper in its 8th October, 1946, issue readily called upon its readers to abjure communal disharmony which, in the shape of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, cleverly manoeuvred by the British rulers to suit their policy of *Divide and Rule,* threatened to bifurcate the nation on communal lines. Such a division stood out against the spirit of true social freedom as envisaged by Vijaya. However, the editorial is optimistic that in the long run all hassels in the way of such social freedom would be overcome, and a new social order based on freedom and equality would see the light of day in the country. But in order to achieve that state, all the progressive and egalitarian forces in the country had to fight with the weapons of knowledge, understanding, love and patience, after abjuring wretched communalism from their mindsets for ever. For, in the words of the editorial :—

> "The spirit of Vijaya is the abjuration of malice, for, as the battle ends, there is no more any enemy, but only friends and brothers."

In another editorial under the same caption, published in the 27th October, 1947, issue of the same newspaper, the relinquishment of communal antagonism between Hindu and Muhammedans was strongly advocated as a major step towards peace and prosperity of the nation, freed recently from British misrule.

The subject of communal antagonism and its relationship with the Durga Puja will be dealt with later in this study. For the present the question of the independence of the country from British yoke is proposed to be studied in the light of the analyses foisted by certain articles or editorials on Vijaya published in the Amrita Bazar Patrika mainly during the thirties and forties of the twentieth century.

An editorial, entitled *'Bijoya'* published in the 17th October,

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1937, issue of the Patrika, is expressive of the nation's longing for independence from foreign domination. To the editor, Vijaya represented the ardent hopes and aspirations of the nation, at large, to achieve freedom.[180]

In another editorial under the same caption, published in the 29th September, 1944 issue of the same newspaper, the concept of Ram-Rajya, which Mahatma Gandhi wished to establish in a free India, was sought to be critically assessed. The editorial laments at the unfortunate distortion of the term by fundamentalist elements who mis-interpreted Gandhiji's dictum as his desire to establish a Hindu Raj in the country after its emancipation from foreign rule. The editorial, contradicts the fundamentalist conception of the term *'Ram Rajya'* by correctly pinpointing to the establishment of the rule of righteousness in the country following the termination of British rule as was envisaged by the Mahatma. However, the attainment of independence pre-supposed the existence of a strong, self-sufficient and healthy India, and this was expressly the message of the Vijaya that the Patrika wished to convey to its readers. In the words of the editorial :—

> "The glory of victory, is, however, not for the weak and the down-trodden, the demoralised and the disintegrated, the self-seekers and the slaves. Vijaya is for the strong, the victorious, and the free... If, therefore, we celebrate that event we do it in the hope that we may be worthy of our great ancestor (viz., Ramachandra), and may one day, like him, vanquish our enemies and celebrate the victory in the manner he did...We have to prepare ourselves morally and spiritually as a nation for that victory which will be our true Vijaya."

Assuming a highly secular stance, the editorial in its Vijaya message further called upon all Indians, irrespective of their religious creeds, to exert their utmost to the task of freeing the country from British rule.

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Once freedom was achieved, the euphoria generated on the occasion knew no bounds. This become evident in an editorial, again captioned *'Vijaya'* published in the 27th October, 1947, issue of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. Characterising the attainment of independence as the true Vijaya gift of Durga, the editorial recalls years of enslavement under foreign rule during which Indians had invoked the Goddess, heart and soul, for a freedom inspired victory, which now showed them on the face.

> "For ninety years we have celebrated Vijaya in the confident hope of ultimate victory. Today the victory is ours!" notes the editorial with stupendous delight. The victory of the Indians that brought about independence from alien misrule was characterised by the Patrika as the triumph of the spirit of good over that of evil. The triumph of good over evil represented the logical sequence of heavenly justice bestowed on Her faithful by Mother Durga. Success was assured to Indians in this context although their struggle against colonialism was long and hard. A long and hard struggle exposed the nation's sincerity for achieving freedom. Now that independence had been achieved, the Asuras of internal dissension and discord still remained to be eliminated on the political and social arena, chief among whom were communalism and sectarianism. The editorial called upon both Hindus and Muslims of the country to discard the path of communal antagonism towards one another, and to lead the nation on the path of national reconstruction, for, "Arms have never changed the hearts of men, but love and service have." And without the extirpation of communalism the victory which the Goddess had gifted to the nation in the shape of independence would remain inconclusive or incomplete.[181]

It would be fruitful, now that our discussion on Vijaya is almost complete, to refer to one last item connected with the

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occasion, viz., *Vijaya Sammilanis*. These were functions organised by Sarbajanin or community Puja committees marking the finale of Durgotsav or Sarodotsav as it is called. These Vijaya Sammilanis were social forums heralding the colourful reunion of people after the Pujas. Exchange of greetings, recitations, music and dance, mimic-shows along with other sundry items graced these merry gatherings. Vijaya Sammilanis were held primarily to strengthen the bonds of friendship and/or cultural ties between individuals or groups.

Contemporary newspapers like the Statesman, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Yugantar and Ananda Bazar Patrika, are replete with details of Vijaya Sammilanis held in the first half of the twentieth century at different parts of Calcutta and the suburbs, very often attended by distinguished people. For instance, the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 2nd October, 1941, reporting on the Vijaya Sammilani Utsav, organised by the Sarbajanin Puja Committee of Harish Park, Bhowanipur, recounted the presence of noteworthy elites like Jnananjan Niyogi, Swami Satyananda, and Principal Devaprasad Ghose, and further furnished information on the screening of educational films on the occasion by the Calcutta Corporation Commercial Museum. The Sammilani was presided over by an eminent educationist, Prof. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar.

The spirit of Vijaya pervaded and animated every nook and corner of Hindu Bengal. Its importance in the context of the nation's independence from foreign rule has been analysed with details in the previous pages. However, its significance in the context of uprooting communalism, was only peripheral if not minimal. It is this communalism, spurred by Hindu-Muslim antagonism over certain major issues related to the Durga Puja festival, that will form the forthcoming focus of this study.

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Part-XIV

The Durgotsav and Hindu-Muslim Discord and Disunity on the Issue

We now come upon an unfortunate phase of history surrounding the Durga Puja celebrations in Calcutta and the mofussil. This relates to the tensions generated owing to Muhammedan opposition to several Hindu rites concerning the immersion ceremony of the Goddess in the forties of the twentieth century. In order to understand the Hindu-Muslim antagonism on the issue, it would be necessary to assess Muhammedan attitude to Hindu festivals, particularly the Durga Puja celebrations, in the past. In a scathing article in Bengali entitled *'Durga : Bangali Mussulman'*, published in a Bengali quarterly, *'Lok Sanskriti Gabeshana'*[182] an eminent Muslim intellectual, Abdur Rauf, refers to the changing pattern of Muslim attitude to Durga Puja in Bengal, particularly after the advent of Wahabism in the province. Rauf dwells upon the prevalence of Sakti worship in Bengal commencing after the completion of the Buddhist age, which greatly attracted Muslims. Durga, an embodiment of the Sakti cult, and Her ensuing worship, thus became cynosures in their eyes, and they began participating in Durga Puja celebrations in the province. Some among them even offered personal Puja or worship to the Mother Goddess, craving for boons.[183] This, again, was promotive of Hindu-Muslim amity in Bengal. It was common for Muslims, particularly in the rural areas, to be invited to Hindu households celebrating Durgotsav. This continued till the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century when the spirit of Wahabism eroded almost all chances of the continuance of this phenomenon. Wahabism, which stood for the militant erasure of all un-Islamic accretions to Muslim society inveighed against idolatrous practices of many Mussalmans,

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among whom the foremost one related to Durga worship or participation in Durga Puja by Muslims. The identity of True Islam was preached among Muhammedans by numerous Wahabi fakirs who castigated in no uncertain terms the Muslim propitiation of Devi Durga. That they were successful is seen from the rapid transformation of Muslim society in Bengal to arch conservatism. Participation in Durgotsav declined, nay stopped altogether, in many areas of the province among Muslims, and the spirit of amity or brotherhood hitherto practised among Hindus and Muslims took a virtual backseat in Bengal's social theatre. This was, of course, not to deny, some form of marginal participation of the Muslims in the festival. But this participation, wherever evinced was fostered mostly on account of economic compulsions rather than by religio-oriented motivations. Thus, in early childhood, Nirad C. Chaudhuri witnessed Muslim drummers at the Durgotsav held at his ancestral village of Banagram in East Bengal.[184] Undoubtedly, these elements had gathered there for pecuniary services for which they were paid by Chaudhuri's family.

It would, however, be a travesty of the truth to indict only Wahabism for the Hindu-Muslim cleavage over Durgotsav and other Hindu festivals. Diehard fundamentalists had pre-existed Wahabism in Bengal who had obstructed the progress of Hindu-processions before mosques, especially the immersion processions of Devi Durga which were attended with music. This has been shown in a novel way by Ghulam Hussain's *Siyar-ul-Mutakharin.*[185] This antagonism was, thus, not the handiwork of English rulers of India, as some people opined, to strengthen their administration through a subtle policy of divide and rule, but had been existent much prior to the British conquest of the country. However, as Kazi Abdul Wadud says, the British, were quick to take advantage of this antagonism to secure the foundations of their empire.[186] Nevertheless, fundamentalism did

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not affect Hindu-Muslim relations on the whole prior to the advent of Wahabism, and being largely a peripheral feature, the two societies continued to lead peaceful and friendly lives which entailed mutual co-operation and participation in each other's festivities. Wahabism dealt a fatal blow to this phenomenon.

Thus, when Bankimchandra Chatterjee composed *'Bandemataram'* where he portrayed India in the image of Mother Durga, or when he wrote his patriotic novel, *Anandamath* in which he incorporated *Bandemataram*, Muslims in Bengal, under the influence of anti-idolatrous Wahabism, could not take very kindly to them. From this time Bengali Muslims started almost en-masse to boycott Durga Puja celebrations in the province. What was more painful was the fact that from about this time, Muslims began to protest openly the passing of Durga immersion processions attended with music before their mosques. Such protests very often took an ugly turn inviting violence from Hindu quarters. And no matter how much liberal or sane elements from both communities tried to stem the tide of violence, such violence became more or less a regular feature of the time.[187]

The present section of this book proposes to deal with some communal crises dealing with the immersion of Durga images in Bengal and their impact on Bengali Hindu Society in the forties of the 20th century. These incidents engineered by Muslim fundamentalists generally, although isolated, were attended with widespread social discontent in contemporary Bengali Hindu society. Most of these unfortunate incidents occurred in Muslim majority areas or zones and were, in the understanding of a large cross-section of the Hindus, a direct fall-out of the Communal Award of the British rulers of which good advantage was taken by fundamentalist Muslims. The Muhammedan authorities and other direct beneficiaries of this Award implemented by the colonial authorities to estrange the Bengali Muslims from the Bengali Hindus worked well, with the Hindu Mahasabha

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unleashing a mighty agitation against impediments created by the Muslim-League-inspired elements to foment trouble over Durga immersion. These incidents have been vividly portrayed in the Amrita Bazar Patrika of the times, and although the newspaper very often sided with the Hindus on the score, it did so on logical and rational grounds and not through a pro-Hindu communal bias. This is seen in quite a few editorials of the newspaper which urged upon both Hindus and Muslims to discard communalism and to work for the speedy regeneration of the country, particularly after Independence. Communalism, in the opinion of the Patrika, was an *Asura*, which needed to be destroyed tooth and nail as Goddess Durga had destroyed Mahisasura. This point is emphasized in an editorial of the newspaper dated 21st October, 1947, and captioned *"Come, O Mother, Come"*. Lauding the success of the nationalists in overthrowing British imperialist rule from the country, the editorial calls upon Indians in independent India to overthrow the demon of communalism fostered till lately by British imperialism. In the words of the editorial :—

"If we have seen the defeat and mortification of the great *Asura* of British imperialism, we must believe that its present offspring, the *Asura* of communalism, cannot live long... Counter-communalism is not the remedy for communalism. If we want the power of Durga to succeed, we must realise that its source and its reserves lie in our own selves. We must disavow communalism in its entirety..."

Analysing the causes of this communalism, the same editorial quips in blatant disgust :—

> "The *Asura* of communalism lay dormant among us, although it was nursed and fostered by the alien ruling power. Its existence is due to the common sins of Hindus and Muslims, and its strength is drawn from the greed of power of which both are guilty. We shall be unworthy sons

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of the Mother (Durga) if we allowed this *Asura* to live longer."

The Editor of the Patrika had undoubtedly seen through the turbulent times of communal antagonism followed by communal frenzy during the 1946 communal riots in Calcutta, prior to partition, and was undoubtedly wary and disgusted at the communal holocaust that claimed thousands of lives throughout the province together with its horrific after-effect signified by mutual suspicion and hatred between Hindus and Muslims. It was this distaste that forced his rational pen to write against this bickering phenomenon of hate which exhibited the demonic instincts of man. It was this distaste that made him characterise communalism as an *asuric* ethos to be castigated by Bengalis—whether Hindu or Muslim—as Goddess Durga had castigated Demon Mahisasura Thus, the accusation often furnished by interested quarters against the Amrita Bazar Patrika of being pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim does not bear scrutiny. The Patrika was impartial and rational in its depiction of communal antagonism brewing from controversies over the immersion ceremony of Durga which vitiated the social atmosphere of Bengal in the forties of the 20th century.

We will now refer to specific instances of communal disharmony flowing from the above phenomenon, that occurred in more-or-less a glaring manner from 1941 onwards. This is not to suggest that such disharmony was not there prior to the forties of the 20th century. There were, but their tempo did not reach such dimensions as in the forties and this needs to be probed in some details to depict the naked face of communal barbarism in Bengal brewing from religious causes.

Durga Puja celebrations registered an ugly turn in 1943 owing to restrictions imposed on the passing of immersion processions with music before mosques by authorities in five places, viz., Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Burdwan, Budge Budge and Mymensing.

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Public anger against the measure was clearly discernible with the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha taking the lead in voicing protest. Hindu public resentment made itself felt through public meetings held at Hazra Park and Wellington Square in Calcutta in which voices were raised against the communal-minded Bengal ministry premiered by A. K. Fazlul Haq and conducted by its Home Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin. The Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, which found an ardent ally in V. D. Sarvarkar[188], the President of the Hindu Mahasabha of India, even went to the extent of organising a general Hartal in Bengal on 5th October, 1941, against what it termed as undue interference with the religious prerogative of the Hindus in organising immersion processions without any hindrance.

While representations on behalf of the Provincial Hindu Mahasabha were made to Nazimuddin and the Divisional Commissioner of Rajshahi urging immediate revocation of the new restrictions which was adhered to after much harangues,[189] the situation in Dinajpur, Budge Budge, Burdwan and Mymensing failed to be tackled easily and led to widespread commotion and discontent in Hindu quarters. This was clearly evinced in fiery speeches against the Government measure of restricting Durga immersion processions with music before mosques even outside prayer hours.

Manmatha Nath Mukherjee, President, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, had clearly stated the principle framed on the issue by the Government in 1926. In a reply to an enquiry made by Khawaja Nazimuddin vis-a-vis the legality of the Dinajpur District Magistrate's order prohibiting music before mosques at all hours during Vijaya immersion processions "which required non-stop music from start to finish according to immemorial usages and religious beliefs"[190], Mr. Manmatha Nath Mukherjee clearly stated that the general rule enunciated by the Government in 1926 was to allow Hindu processions, with music before

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mosques outside prayer hours. The Government had decreed that this general rule was to apply all over Bengal, unless a custom was set up on the contrary. However, that contrary custom, if at all initiated, had to be satisfactorily proved to the authorities before it could acquire Government sanction.[191]

Unfortunately, according to Mukherjee, licences issued by the local authorities, in many places, aimed at curtailing the rights of the processionists much further than the general rule of 1926 warranted, resulting in troubles frequently occurring at several places. The cause for such curtailment of the 1926 privilege accorded to Hindu processionists lay, according to Mukherjee, in a widely talked about confidential circular issued by the Government in the meantime to all its executive officers, instructing them to refuse licences to allow Hindu processionists to conduct immersion processions with music before mosques at any hour of the day and night.[192]

Mukherjee's queries in the form of an open letter to the Chief Minister, A. K. Fazlul Haq, as to the actual existence of this confidential circular, remaining unanswered, and with immersion processions accompanied by music being grossly restricted passage before mosques, the situation registered an ugly turn with Durga images lying unimmersed in many places much to the chagrin of the Hindu community.

The Amrita Bazar of 3rd October, 1941, refers pointedly to the unhealthy spectacle of Durga images lying un-immersed in Mymensing, Dinajpur, and Budge Budge as a mark of protest by the Hindus against the new Government order. The 5th October Hartal organised by the Hindu Mahasabha was thus, a logical sequel to the entire murky episode. In many places, like for instance, Burdwan, the District Magistrates and police chiefs being Muslims, the new ban was sought to be rigidly imposed.[193]

The Amrita Bazar Patrika, despite its non-communal stances, could not but rationally and logically sympathise with Hindu

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aspiration on the score which was being unjustly denied by Government. What, however, was unique about the Patrika's stand was that it did not blame Muhammedans en-masse for this catastrophe, but lampooned the Government for its dubious stand which spearheaded the crisis. In a column, captioned *'By The Way'*, published in the 3rd October, 1941, issue of the newspaper, the Patrika's sentiments on the score were well inunciated. Pointing to the amity that prevailed between the two communities even half a century earlier, the Patrika referred to Muslims who took part in Hindu immersion processions in times of yore. The newspaper, lamenting the present unfortunate communal tension issuing from the confidential circular, castigated the British Government's policy of *Divide and Rule* which was primarily behind such issuance, and which threatened to be promotive of much dissension and discord between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal.[194]

In trying to show how ordinary Hindus and Muslims in Bengal endeavoured whole-heartedly to play down communal tensions among themselves which issued over *'Government-sponsored'* controversies relating to playing of music before mosques by Hindu processionists, the Patrika even published a news item expressive of Hindu-Muslim solidarity shown by both Hindu as well as Muhammedan workers of the Anglo-Indian Jute Mills of Jagatdal, near Calcutta, who expressed their determination never to come to blows over trivial matters like those relating to playing of music before mosques or cow-sacrifice. The Patrika records the publication of a handbill to this effect by those Mill workers to whom *"religion was a personal matter concerned with the formation of character rather than the breaking of each-others' heads over frivolous rituals and formalities."*[195] The spirit of co-operation and sympathy, was also witnessed at Mymensing where as the Patrika observes, Muslims in general were "overtly or covertly sympathetic towards the Hindus" vis-a-vis new

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Government restrictions on Durga immersions.[196]

However, intense distaste and dissatisfaction was evoked among the Hindu population of Mymensing over the controversy where many a Hindu did not observe the traditional Kolakuli or Vijaya greetings in protest.[197] With Hindus of the city stopping the immersion of Durga images as a protest, the local Durgabari authorities of Mymensing lent their premises for accommodating the images from those houses where it was not possible to keep them for long, and these images were duly honoured by the Durgabari authorities with regular Puja and Arati which, they decided, were to continue, till immersion.[198]

The reaction of the Hindus to the Government ban needs to be viewed in some details in order to ascertain the pulse of throbbing Hindu antagonism on the unfortunate issue. The first move of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha on the issue was to organise a general strike or Hartal on Sunday, 5th October, 1941, declaring the day as one of *"fasting, mourning, and penance"*. The Mahasabha also simultaneously organised a public protest meeting on 4th October, at Sraddhananda Park, in Central Calcutta, where Hindu orators of proven merit could ventilate their grievances over the issue.[199] Among the distinguished convenors of the meeting were the following :—

(1) Ramananda Chatterjee.
(2) Monmotha Nath Mukherjee, President, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha.
(3) Phanindranath Brahma, Mayor, Calcutta Corporation.
(4) Jatindranath Sen, Member of the Legislative Council, Dinajpur.
(5) Prof. Hari Charan Ghose.
(6) Swami Satyananda.
And
(7) Rai Saheb, Haralal Haldar of Budge Budge.

The mammoth meeting was presided over by

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Mahamahopadhay Durga Charan Sankhya Vedantatirtha. Fiery speeches were made by numerous speakers characterising the Government orders on Durga Niranjan (or immersion) processions as grossly unconstitutional and illegal, and also strongly condemning the sinister attitude of the Government in imposing restrictions on Hindu religious processions in Dinajpur, Mymensing and Budge Budge.

The meeting unanimously adopted two resolutions, viz. :—

(1) To appeal to the Government not to adopt any discriminatory attitude against the Hindu community and to withdraw the unfair prohibitions on Niranjan processions in different parts of Bengal.

And,

(2) To call upon the Hindu ministers of the Bengal Government to resign as a mark of sympathy for the bereaved Hindu communities at Mymensing, Budge Budge and Dinajpur.

It would be fruitful here to delve into the opinions of several top-ranking speakers at this public meeting in order to assess their attitude to the Bengal Government on the score.

According to Mahamahopadhay Durga Charan Sankhya Vedantatirtha, Durga Puja was an universal affair extending to the Muslim community, besides the Hindus in general, as was seen by the pompous celebration of this Puja by Muhammedan zamindars in various parts of Bengal. The new Government ban on Niranjan processions was a ploy to disunite the two communities on communal lines.[200]

To barrister B. C. Chatterjee the entire incident was the direct fall-out of the Communal Award of the imperialist British Government aimed at creating a permanent cleavage in the ranks of the Hindus and the Muslims with the deliberate intention of murdering the nationalist movement of India. This, again, was intended to prolong British sway in the country.

According to Chatterjee, the malafide expectation of the

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authors of the *Communal Award* was that when members would be returned to the Legislatures on the basis of it, they would be bound to be communally minded and would soon split up their respective provinces into two water-tight compartments seething with communal poison and thirsting for each-others' blood. However, Hindus who were true nationalists at heart had belied such expectation. In Chatterjee's opinion, Muslims elected on communal tickets, with certain noteworthy exceptions, fully justified the imperialist dream.

In Chatterjee's estimation :—

> "The Muslim League is a grandiose blossom, after the imperialists' heart, on the Upas tree of the Communal Award. And nowhere in India is the poison of that tree more deadly than in Bengal. And if the soil of Bengal can be dyed red with the blood of Bengal's Hindu and Muslim children, imperialism will have another hundred years' tenure in our country."[201]

The Bengali Hindu in B. C. Chatterjee's opinion had tolerated many indignities inflicted upon him and his community by Bengal's communalist cabinet. But the indignities now intended to be thrust upon him by that cabinet in the way of new restrictions on Durga immersion processions could not be endured as the measures hurt the tenderest region of his soul by deeply wounding his religious feelings. Chatterjee urged upon the Hindus to motivate the authorities to revoke the new immersion law.[202]

While Monmotho Nath Mukherjee more or less echoed the sentiments of B. C. Chatterjee[203], barrister N. C. Chatterjee was more vociferous in his protest, dwelling on the fallacies of the new Government orders. By quoting legal authorities Chatterjee showed that such orders were both illegal and unconstitutional, interfering as they did with the legitimate civic rights of Hindu citizens. Urging the Hindu community to resist tooth and nail the new order, he reminded them that Goddess Durga Herself

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was the embodiment of resistance against evil.

Characterising Durga Puja as a national festival of Bengal, which from ages past was celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims alike, Chatterjee castigated fundamentalist Muslim leaders *"with the reactionary mentality of Pakistan"*. who sought to turn Bengal into a theatre of communal violence.[204]

While sentiments identical to the ones expressed by N. C. Chatterjee were voiced by the Mayor of Calcutta, Phanindranath Brahma, Rai Bahadur Jatindra Mohan Sen from Dinajpur preferred a long thought-out plan of action against the authorities rather than any hasty decision on the matter. This spirit, however, did not evoke much warm response from the audience who were more sympathetic towards the idea of direct immediate action mooted by Swami Satyananda and Kumar Saradindu Narayan Roy, the latter also hailing from Dinajpur.[205]

Besides the protest meeting at Sraddhananda Park, similar protests were aired from public rostrums at Wellington Square in Central Calcutta and Hazra Park in South Calcutta by eminent Hindu leaders on the very day of the Hartal, i.e., on 5th October, 1941. Both these meetings, again, like the meeting in Sraddhananda Park on the previous day, were organised by the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha and were well attended.[206]

The loud protests of the Hindu Mahasabha against the authorities permeated the ranks of Hindu students as well with the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 5th October, 1941, publishing an appeal of the *Bengal Hindu Students Federation* to all Hindu students to observe *All Bengal Protest Day* on that date.[207]

Hartal was observed in many other places in Bengal, other than in Calcutta in direct response to the clarion call on the score issued by the Bengali Provincial Hindu Mahasabha. This hartal, which was restricted to the Hindu community only, was held, for example, in Dacca and Burdwan, with the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 6th October, 1941, reporting on the positive response

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to the same from Hindu quarters signified by the closure of all Hindu educational and commercial establishment in these towns. Like in Calcutta, Hindu denizens of Burdwan under the auspices of the Burdwan District Hindu Mahasabha organised a public protest meeting at Bangsogopal Town Hall with Mr. Girindra Kumar Chatterjee, the Municipal Chairman, presiding.[208]

The agitation launched by the Hindu Mahasabha, starting with a bang, ended with a whimper. The communal Bengal ministry, backed by the imperialist British rulers of the country, were unwilling to concede even an iota to the Mahasabha's demands on immersion processions of Devi Durga which subsequently, had either to take alternative routes to the immersion arenas, or in the event of taking normal routes, as at Mymensing, Dinajpur, and Budge Budge, were constrained to do so, before mosques, outside prayer times, and of course without music. The comparative silence on the fall-out of the Hindu agitation manifested by the Hindu periodicals of the time, like *Yugantar, Basumati,* and the *Ananda Bazar Patrika,* speaks volumes for the above premise. However, this immersion fiasco left a bad-taste in Hindu mouths and the anti-Muslim and anti-Bengal Ministry feelings remained rampant in many a Hindu heart spelling out much communal discord and dissensions in later years, as will be shown presently. Fundamentalist Muhammedans led by the Muslum League were elated over this discomfiture of the Hindus under the banner of the Mahasabha, and it prompted such Muslims to participate in acts of vandalism against Durga images and immersion processes in the coming years.

The communal fiasco over Durga immersion in 1941 may be characterised as a sort of direct sequel to the communal flare-up in Dacca earlier in March the same year which entailed a tragic lose of life and property. The Bengal Ministry's dubious role vis-a-vis Durga immersions might have been communal in the eyes of the Hindu Mahasabha, but it might also have been

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prompted by the rational desire to maintain communal peace, stung as it was earlier by the Dacca riots of March, 1941.[209]

The Mahasabha's prestige, however, suffered a serious setback over the whole issue and its intrinsic weakness was grossly exposed through its failure to force the hands of the Bengal Government over the question of immersion processions playing music before mosques outside Muslim prayer times.

The failure of the Hindu Mahasabha on the same issue was further repeated in the following years, immediately prior to the Great Calcutta Killings in August, 1946, inspired and initiated by the Muslim League Chief Minister of Bengal, Saheed Shurawardy. The incidents veering on communal antagonism, between Hindus and Muslims, over Durga immersions and other issues, in these years recorded scrupulously by the Amrita Bazar Patrika of the times, deserve mention.

The first incident recorded by the Amrita Bazar Patrika[210] occurred in 1944 when Durga Puja was stalled at Sandwip in the Noakhali district of Eastern Bengal, following the promulgation of an order by the local authorities under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The order which followed an objection by local Muslims was served immediately after the Bodhan ceremony of the Goddess had been performed.

This unfortunate incident invited justifiable vitrolic from the Patrika, which condemned tooth and nail the over-zealous tendencies on the part of the local officers of the Government at Sandwip, and in the words of the newspaper correspondent :—

> "This sort of religious observances is outrageous in all conscience."

Nothing much seems to have transpired in favour of the Hindus, who were in a Muslim majority area of Sandwip and as news favourable to the Hindus did not appear any further in contemporary newspapers, it may well be surmised that the Durga Puja celebrations at Sandwip could not be immediately revived

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principally owing to local Muslim hostility fanned and covertly supported by a communal and fascist Bengal Ministry.

The other recorded incident of communal discord occurred during the Durga Puja celebrations of the following year, viz., 1945.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 19th October, 1945, published a detailed report on communal violence over Durga immersion at Lalmonirhat, in the Rangpur district of Eastern Bengal, causing the death of one Hindu and serious injuries to twenty-two other Hindu processionists. A telegram to this effect dispatched by Mr. Tarun Chakrabarti, Secretary of the Rangpur District Hindu Mahasabha, was received, according to the Patrika, by the Calcutta Office of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha. The sequel to this trouble was the total destruction of Durga images taken out for immersion by violent Muslim mobs at Lalmonirhat as per the contents of another telegram despatched to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, by one Tribhuvan Singh on behalf of the local Hindu population of Lalmonirhat. According to the telegram the military personnel posted at the area intervened only when the situation went out of control.[211] The Patrika, however, does not clarify why such violence occurred at Lalmonirhat, and whether it was a direct outcome of Hindu immersion processions playing music before mosques which might have given offence to the local Muslims of Lalmonirhat. The 29th October, 1945, issue of the paper furnishes a favourable report of a belated immersion of the Goddess at Lalmonirhat with due religious rites. The entire incident deeply wounded Hindu sentiments, undoubtedly.

In another news item of the same newspaper of the same date, captioned *'Images Lying Unimmersed'*, painful information was elicited of four images of Goddess Durga lying unimmersed at the town of Naraingunge, Dacca, as a sequel to Hindu opposition to the police licence issued directing Durga immersion

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procession to use alternative routes to the one always used by them, viz., via Chambers Road, on which stood a large mosque. Although protracted negotiations yielded some favourable concessions from the local authorities who agreed to allow the processionists to pass along Chambers Road with the usual condition, Hindu hopes on the score were, again, woefully baulked, subsequently, owing to the insistence of the local police to the effect that the procession should not play music throughout the entire length of that road. Immersions were further suspended as a result with Hindus in Naraingunge soliciting intervention of the Governor of Bengal on the matter through a telegram, copies of which were despatched to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, to the Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and to other notable Indian leaders.[212] However, nothing positive transpired, and the Hindu residents of Naraingunge were finally constrained to adopt alternative new routes for their immersion processions.

Other instances of Hindu repressions were furnished by the Amrita Bazar Patrika. The newspaper of 17th October, 1945, reports on the non-immersion of sixty images at Dhaleswari, near Mir Kadim at Munshiganj, Dacca, as a mark of protest by the Hindus against restrictions in the police licence with regard to playing of music before mosques not being modified.[213]

The Patrika of the same date refers to the volatile situation over Durga immersion processions in other areas of Dacca district like Ramnagar and Rikabibazar Abdullahpur Union, where, like at Munshiganj and other places, such processions were debarred from passing mosques with music not only during Muslims prayer hours, but at all hours of the day and night. At Ramnagar, collusion between the Muslims and the local police issuing licences for Durga immersion was clearly manifest. This is evident from the action of certain Muslims at Ramnagar endeavouring to convince the Magistrate and other local authorities on the prime

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necessity of imposing Section 144 at the place, thereby prohibiting immersion processions with music before mosques on the way.[214]

Commenting on a similar odious situation that occurred at Ramnagar on the previous year (viz., 1944), the Patrika alludes to legal wrangles between the Hindus and Muslims, then, over the immersion of the Durga image worshipped at the principal Sarbajanin Puja Mandap at Ramnagar. And when all efforts at compromise over the issue failed, forced immersion of the image which hitherto lay unimmersed was ultimately performed in the presence of high dignitaries of the local Government, like the District Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police and other officials who had been accompanied by a posse of armed constables especially deputed for supervising this forced immersion.[215] However, according to the Patrika, the situation in 1945 was far more calamitous than the previous year, warranting immediate official as well as non-official intervention.[216] For while the immersion of only a handful of images were held up at Ramnagar, about one hundred images lay un-immersed at Rikabibazar Abdullahpur Union in the Munshiganj subdivision of the district of Dacca.[217]

The Patrika of the same date refers, subsequently, to a deputation of Hindus representing thirtyfive villages of the Munshiganj subdivision of Dacca to the District Magistrate, F.O. Bell, seeking an immediate solution to the crisis, with the local Hindu MLA, Prof. Atul Chandra Sen, accompanying the deputationists. The deputationists enlightened the District Magistrate on all the relevant facts and urged upon him the necessity of allowing Hindu processionists to play music before mosques at all hours save Muslims prayer times in accordance with immemorial custom on the score. Mr. Bell gave the deputationists a patient hearing and at the suggestion of Prof. Sen agreed to visit the affected locality on the following day.

The Magistrate's visit, however, was disappointing for the

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Hindus. For while he was agreeable to allow music before one mosque outside Muslim prayer hours, he was not in the least agreeable to do so before two other mosques of the region including that at Ramnagar, where, it was alleged by the Hindus that the District Magistrate had himself allowed music on the previous year, viz., in 1944. Prof. Atul Sen's remonstrances against the decision of the District Magistrate proving futile, all actions on the issue were temporarily shelved till the arrival of a Hindu Mahasabha representative from Calcutta. Images remained unimmersed and tension prevailed over the unsettled issue.

The arrival of one Mr. Bhupendra Chandra Lahiri the Mahasabha's representative from Calcutta to Dacca on October 22nd[218] to sort out a reasonable and respectable solution for the Hindus of Ramnagar and other adjoining villages in the Munshigunge subdivision of Dacca did not materialise fruitfully for the Hindus owing to vehement opposition of the local authorities backed by an interested Muslim League, and immersion processions had either to take alternative routes or stop playing music on old routes wherein mosques stood.

The public humiliation of the Hindus over the Durga immersion question in many parts of Bengal embittered Hindus against the Muslim community in the province although instances of rationalist Muhammedan sympathy for the just Hindu cause were clearly manifested in many areas. For example, in 1941, many Mussalmans of Mymensing were, in the words of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, "either overtly or covertly sympathetic towards the Hindus,"[219] over the immersion issue discussed earlier in this book. However, such rationalist sympathy was not an universal phenomenon in Bengal, and in many places Muslim ruffianism ruled the roost and this alienated a large cross-section of the Hindu community against Muslims and a distinct communal cleavage was created paving the way for the Great Calcutta Killings of August, 1946, followed by the communal

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holocaust in Noakhali later on.

And although the above incidents which occurred in the time span between 1941 to 1945 were concentrated in mofussil areas, Calcutta was not without its cup of misery in this respect. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 17th October, 1945, in a news item captioned *'Baranagore Fracas'*, depicts in no mean colours the assault on a Durga immersion procession by a violent Muslim mob at Baranagore in Calcutta.[220]

The Hindu Mahasabha's role in trying to diffuse the crises was commendable and its actions in favour of the Hindu community at large over the immersion issue was rational to the core. Unfortunately such rationalist endeavours failed to mollify fundamentalist Muslim public opinion backed by a hostile Muslim League which could sway Government opinion in its favour. One thing, however, must be kept in mind. The incidents occurred mostly in places where Muslims represented a majority and where the numerical strength of rational-minded Muslims was small. This proved highly favourable for the development of anti-Hindu mentality among Muslims fomented and fanned by the pro-Pakistan die-hards of the local Muslim League.

The communal riots of August, 1946, fomented and fanned by the Muslim League Ministry in Calcutta following the call of Direct Action Day by the League in response to the negative attitude of the Congress headed by Jawaharlal Nehru to the Cabinet Mission proposal to form an interim Government manned by both Congress and League representative, further embittered the relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities with the Hindus taking the side of the Congress and the Muslims that of the League.[221] The communal carnage of 1946 had virtually no parallel in comtemporary India and ruptured all chances of rapport between the two communities, leaving a permanent impresse of hatred and suspicion between the Hindus and Muslims. And whatever mollifying speeches were subsequently

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made by the leaders of both camps for the observation of a peaceful Durga Puja or Id in the following months were motivated by political expediency to ensure peace in an otherwise rugged communal terrain.

Thus, when Saheed Shurawardy, the Muslim League Chief Minister called upon both Hindus and Muslims to maintain peace during the Durga Puja celebrations in the province,[222] it sounded extremely hollow, judging from the fact that it was Shurawardy himself, who, with other League associates, first let loose the August, 1946 communal holocaust against the Hindus in Calcutta, termed in historical parlance, as the *Great Calcutta Killings.* Even then, the conciliatory speech of the Chief Minister had strong communal anti-Hindu undertones, when he referred specifically to Hindu immersion processionists insisting on playing their musical instruments a little louder than usual before mosques, or to unconfirmed reports of Hindu street urchins endeavouring to demolish mosques, and called upon the Muslims not to be provoked by such incidents or any other smacking of Hindu provocation. Paying no heed to Hindu sentiments on the score, Shurawardy clearly expressed his pro-Pakistan mentality when he remarked candidly thus :—

> "The Muslim nation will still be a great nation even though it is defiled in some places by a mischievous spirit. I think that we shall still be greater if we only know how to control ourselves, and if we can make our minds see that we shall not be provoked and nothing can provoke...To the Hindus I do beg and pray that they too will conduct their Puja celebration in such a manner that they should realise that side by side with them also live another people that cannot join them in the Puja celebrations, and that they might also carry on their own celebrations in their own way without tempting the Muslims."

The onus of blame in Shurawardy's speech thus indirectly

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rested on Hindus and his reference to Hindu provocation clearly reflected his biased, pro-Muslims mentality. The entire speech of the Chief Minister smacked of an anti-Hindu attitude without even an iota of sympathy for the innocent Hindus so cruelly massacred by Muslim hoodlums in the Great Calcutta Killings in the previous months.

The speech of the Chief Minister, however, although it failed to mollify Hindu sentiments, worked, nonetheless, towards a peaceful Durgotsav in the city and the mofussil in 1946, with little or no untoward incidents taking peace as a consequence.

Hectic campaigning for a peaceful Durga Puja and Id marked both Eastern and Western Bengal in 1947. Independence had just set in with the laceration of the nation into Hindusthan and Pakistan. Morbid memories of communal strife, followed by the spectre of partition, were rife in the minds of Bengalis, the eastern part of whose province was now East Pakistan. It was the apprehension of communal strife that made the authorities alert in both Calcutta and Eastern Pakistan, and made them place great emphasis on seeking to assuage the sentiments of both Hindus and Muslims and to motivate them to adopt peaceful ways of celebrating their festivals through various ways. The year seemed particularly inauspicious in the context of Vijaya Dashami and Id falling on two successive days. Speeches by the leaders of both West Bengal and East Pakistan urging communal peace during Durga Puja and Bakr-Id or Id-ud-zoha were delivered at random while joint tour programmes were undertaken by them at sensitive areas of the two Bengals to ensure public tranquility so adversely ruptured by the Great Calcutta Killings and other instances of communal frenzy of the previous years. Apart from peace parleys organised by the constituted authorities, peace ventures in Calcutta were also undertaken by the leaders of almost all political parties together with leading artists, intellectuals and journalists in the city. This was followed by the

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establishment of Santi Senas or youth groups in every Hindu locality or Muslim mohallas to ensure communal harmony in Calcutta.

With the *peace-mantra* hovering in his mind, Mr. Habibullah Bahar, Minister in the Nazimuddin Government of East Bengal arrived at Bogra on 11th October, 1947, to confer with the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Congress, and the Communist Parties, as well as the Muslim League in the city on the peace measure already adopted or likely to be adopted in Eastern Bengal.

Assuring the authorities at Bogra, of the determination of the Nazimuddin Government to put down lawlessness with a firm hand in East Pakistan, he enlightened them of the measures adopted by his Government to safeguard the interests of the Hindu minorities in East Bengal and to make their Durga Puja a huge success.[223]

Habibullah's assurance from Bogra, encouraged the West Bengal Chief Minister, Prafulla Chandra Ghose, to make a statement before the Muhammedan residents of Kalabagan Bustee at Calcutta on 16th October, 1947, assuring members of both Hindu and Muslim communities in Calcutta of all Government assistance in ensuring the promulgation of equal opportunities to both the communities for the celebration of their respective festivities, viz., Durgotsav and Id.[224] Reminding the audience that love, not hatred, was the essence of both Hinduism and Islam, Dr. Ghose appraised the Hindu majority in West Bengal of their role in protecting minority interests whenever and wherever they were sought to be challenged by Hindu fundamentalists. Communal harmony, according to him, was the imperative need of the hour in the context of the forthcoming social reform measures of his Government. Dr. Ghose's Kalabagan address on the 16th of October, 1947, was followed by his joint appeal with the Premier of East Pakistan, Nazimuddin on the

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following day, to the people of both East Pakistan and West Bengal to maintain communal harmony during the forthcoming Durgotsav and Id festivals. The appeal informed the public of the joint peace missions to be undertaken at various places in East and West Bengal by members of both Hindu and Muslim communities immediately prior to these festivals, and assured them of all co-operation from their respective Governments. The two leaders urged upon the majority communities in both Bengals to come forward to assist their minority brethren in trying situations wherever such situations occurred during the observance of their festivities.[225]

Even prior to the issuance of the joint appeal, the Chief Minister of West Bengal had, at a conference of district police chiefs and district magistrates, held at Writers' Buildings, Calcutta, on 15th October, 1947, urged them to ensure strict public peace in their respective zones during Durga Puja and Id celebrations.[226] This, again, was preceded by an appeal to the Muslims of East Pakistan by S. M. Osman, Ex-Mayor of Calcutta and Secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League, in an exclusive interview with the UPI, not to place any impediments to the performance of Durgotsav by the minority Hindus in that place urging the Hindus of East Pakistan upon the maintenance of an atmosphere of cordiality with their Muslim brothers during Durga Puja. Osman, in his interview remarked :—

> "The grand festival of the Puja is an occasion of joy. I would request my Hindu brethren to perform this ceremony in such a way that their Muslim brethren may be able to share the joy which the festival brings to them every year."

Osman also laid utmost stress on the maintenance of happy relations between the two communities during Bakr-Id, and specially urged the Muslims of Calcutta not to do anything during Id-uz-zoha that could ruffle Hindu nerves.[227]

That the authorities of Calcutta were hell bent upon the

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maintenance of peace during Durgotsav, was clear in a notification issued by the Commissioner of Calcutta Police on 16th October, 1947, prohibiting music before mosque during Muslim prayer hours, or warning Hindus not to carry sticks, clubs or any other offensive weapons during the immersion ceremony of the Goddess Durga, or to discharge fireworks during the passage of immersion processions on Calcutta streets.[228]

Requests for public tranquillity during Puja and Bakr-Id were also launched by certain influential circles in Calcutta. The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 19th October, 1947, refers to a joint appeal made by the editors of fourteen daily newspapers of the city to both communities to preserve peace during the festivities. The signatories of this appeal were : Mr. Tushar Kanti Ghose of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Mr. Chapala Kanto Bhattacharyya of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Mr. J. M. Stephen of the *Statesman*, Mr. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin of the *Azad*, Mr. S. Sinha of the *Hindusthan Standard*, Mr. Somnath Lahiri of *Swadhinata*, Mr. A. R. Khan of *Rozana Hind*, Mr. J. C. Himkar of the *Daily Jagriti*, Mr. Vivekananda Mukherjee of the *Yugantar*, Mr. Ali Karim of the *Asre Jaidid*, Mr. K. A. Khan of the *Mohammadi*, Mr. Abul Mansoor Ahmed of the *Ittehad*, Mr. Ahmed Ansari of the *Star of India*, and Sayyid Mohsin Ali of the *Morning News*.[229]

The joint appeal for peace issued by the editors of the 14 Calcutta newspapers was followed by a peace move organised by the leaders of prominent Leftist Parties who met at the Metropole Hotel in Calcutta with a view to present a joint front for maintaining peace during the Puja-Id week. Among the noted stalwarts who assembled at the hotel premises for the meeting were the following :—

(a) Satya Ranjan Bakshi, Amiya Nath Bose, Monoranjan Banerjee and Santi Sen of the *Socialist Republican Party*.
(b) Tridib Choudhuri, Makhan Pal, and Debabrata Roy of the *Revolutionary Socialist Party*.
(c) Debnath Das of the *INA*.

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(d) Atindra Nath Bose and Kiron Mitra of the *Forward Block*. And

(e) Jyoti Basu, Somnath Lahiri, Bhawani Sen, Niranjan Sen, and Ranen Sen of the *Communist Party of India*.

The participants of this joint meet agreed to mobilise all leftist forces for the maintenance of communal harmony during the Puja and Id week. A two-member committee was formed for the purpose with the decision to co-opt representatives from other parties who agreed to join the committee.[230]

Besides the implementation of precautionary measures for Puja and Id celebrations through the enhancement of police and para-military personnel in sensitive areas of Calcutta and the suburbs,[231] a fresh programme for peace in the city was launched by leading artists and intellectuals of West Bengal under the banner of the *Bangiya Sanskriti Sammelan*.[232] They included Tarasankar Banerjee, Mustaq Ali Khan, Pankaj Mullick, Saifuddin Ahmed, Niren Lahiri, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Chhabi Biswas, Ahindra Chaudhuri, Sachin Dev Burman, Sailen Roy, Rajen Sarkar, Kamal Dasgupta, and Shreemati Molina Devi.

The participants agreed to proceed to all Hindu and Muslim zones of the city and its suburbs during the Durga Puja and Id week, preaching the message of peace and communal harmony among the people. They also decided to hold a joint Vijaya and Id unity social at Wellington Square on Sunday, 26th October, 1947, after the termination of Durgotsav and Id-uz-zoha. Again on 25th October, these artists and intellectuals agreed to assuage Muslim sentiments through the exchange of Id greetings at the principal Muslim Mohallas in Calcutta and its suburbs.

The efforts of Hindu and Muslim leaders, politicians, artists and intellectuals towards the maintenance of peace were promotive of desired results and both the festivals passed off peacefully in both the wings of Bengal barring only minor incidents here and there. The weighty arguments for communal

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harmony advanced by such stalwarts like Fazlul Haq[233] and the West Bengal Governor, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari[234], eased many a ruffled heart and restrained them from the odious path of communal violence.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika was no less vociferous in foisting communal harmony through its editorials. One such editorial, entitled, *'The Spirit of Religion'*, published in the *20th October, 1947, issue* of the paper, was blatant in its advocacy of communal amity during the Puja-Id week of October, 1947. Castigating communal discord, it criticised in no unmeasured terms politicians who took advantage of communal antagonism between Hindus and Muslims to further their own ends. In the words of the editorial :—

> "Religion has been prostituted for various purposes, political purpose being one of them."

Dwelling on the unity of God to which the paths of all religions converged, the editorial emphasized the futility of religious discord between the proponents of Hinduism and those of Islam when the aims of the two faiths lay in the ultimate realisation of God.

Commenting upon the necessity of wiping off, permanently, all discord and dissensions between the two communities from the face of India, the editorial reiterates in no uncertain terms:—

> "We have been unable to break the vicious circle of hatred out of which springs the desire for retaliation. That circle has to be broken and broken for good. Even if there be hate, we must conquer it by love. It is only thus that the vicious circle can be broken."

A particular aspect during this period was the formation of Santi Senas or peace soldiers in many parts of Calcutta to ensure communal harmony. The Amrita Bazar Patrika's October, 1947, issues are replete with the Santi Sena's activities in the city. The 14th October, 1947, issue of the newspaper reports on the holding

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of a North Calcutta convention by the Santi Sena chiefs who offered total co-operation to Pandit Nehru in his endeavour to restore communal harmony in the country. The convention, which was held at the Baghbazar Reading Library Hall, and was attended by 125 delegates, was chaired by Hemanta Kumar Basu, MLA, with Mr. Sudhir Roy, the then Mayor of Calcutta, being the Chief Guest.

This convention further expressed the determination to *"carry to the letter"* the *death pledge* given to Mahatma Gandhi by responsible denizens of the city for the maintenance of communal peace in Calcutta, paying special attention to the forthcoming Durga Puja and Id festivals on which occasions a fresh bid for violence was not ruled out.

The convention characterised communal riots, like those in Punjab and Bengal as the handmaids of the British imperialists who were trying to sabotage the consolidation of the newly won freedom and national reconstruction plans of India by plunging the country into chaos and communal strife.

The convention laid down elaborate guidelines for the maintenance of peace and communal amity during the Puja-Id week in Bengal, particularly in Calcutta, through the formation of Santi Sena brigades in different areas of the city for that purpose.

The development of the Santi Senas was colossal with the Patrika recording the enlistment of 60,000 youths, comprising both men and women in the Sena fold. Their work lay in touring sensitive communal areas of the city during the Puja-Id week, and organising peace meetings in these places in conjunction with Hindu, Sikh and Muslim leaders. Sena volunteers were also directed to preach the credo of tolerance and non-violence, personally, to people in these localities, particularly in the Puja-Id week in Calcutta and the suburbs, in the wake of reports filtering from East Pakistan on the abandonment of Durgotsav

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by many members of the Hindu community there smarting under the fear of communal violence from the Muslim majority.[235] Impressive rallies of the Santi Sena were held in different areas of Calcutta to ensure peace in the festive season, the most prominent among which were the Nikashipara meeting at Shyambazar, the Garpar Rally in North Calcutta, and the Burrabazar Aman Sabha at the Khaingraputty Maidan in Burrabazar, North Calcutta. A women's peace drive under the auspices of the Maniktala Mahila Santi Sena Committee, in North Calcutta was also organised.[236]

To ensure communal harmony between Hindu and Muslim women, the Maniktala Mahila Santi Sena Committee, in conjunction with *Begam Muhammed Ali Brigade* and the *Paril Noadha Janana Mahfil of Mirzapur*, organised a *Saradiya Priti Sammelan* of Hindu and Muslim women at the Nari Siksha Samiti's Bani Bhavan Hall, situated at Upper Circular Road in North Calcutta.

Besides the activities of the Santi Senas in ensuring communal harmony, citizen forums in Calcutta arranged joint meetings of the members of both communities to foster communal ties during Durgotsav and Id in 1947, the most noteworthy being the organisation of *Bejoya-Id Sammilani* by the Central Control Board of the Citizens' Defence Force in Calcutta. The Sammilani was held at the Subhas Institute of Culture in Calcutta, on 26th October, 1947, i.e., immediately after the completion of the Durga Puja and Id that year.

The intensive efforts of the Governments of both wings of Bengal, together with similar ardours made by the Santi Sena and numerous citizens' forums in Calcutta and the districts, ensured more or less a trouble-free Puja.

That Hindu-Muslim rapport could be restored to some extent at this period may be discerned from the instance at Sandwip, in Eastern Bengal, where Muslims were found to participate in

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Durgotsav celebrations. Sandwip had in previous years been rocked by communal tension with Muslims refusing to allow Durgotsav there.[237] If, however, the example of Sandwip Muhammedans was not wholly emulated by Muslims in other parts of Bengal or Calcutta, they, at least refrained from communal disharmony or discord over Durgotsav with their Hindu brethren, a phenomenon emulated by the latter during the Muslim celebration of Id-uz-zoha.

The peaceful celebration of the Durgotsav and Id in 1947, drew warm praise from numerous quarters. That the Hindus and Muslims co-operated fully in the two wings of Bengal to ensure a successful Puja and Id was remarkable. Such co-operation brought back memories of past friendship that had been ruptured of late through various factors, the most important being the misunderstandings immediately preceding partition. The dawn of Independence, and the, ecstatic euphoria connected with the same had engulfed men's minds and the general masses were too much engrossed in their new-found freedom to delve in communal frenzy. The peaceful celebration of Durga Puja and Id showed how tired were the common people of the evils of communal politics that had rent their hearths and homes for the past few years. And although two new nations had been born chiefly on communal lines, the mentality of the common man was one of peace and not of communal belligerence. Of course, such belligerence was destined to occur in the future and is a common feature of sub-continental politics today. However, such belligerence was sought to be eschewed immediately and at least for the time being, after Independence as was epitomised through the peaceful celebration of Durgotsav and Id in West Bengal and in East Pakistan.

And although this placidity was not permanent, as later discords showed, yet the temporary satisfaction of viewing such peace after years of communal strife made the Amrita Bazar

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Patrika reach dizzy height of undigested interpretation when in an editorial, captioned *'The Answer'*, published in its 28th October, 1947, issue, it tersely opined thus :—

> "The peaceful observance of Puja and Id completely negatives Mr. Jinnah's two-nation theory. He has stated that the tragedies in the Punjab and elsewhere have proved to the hilt that Hindus and Muslims are two nations. Just the contrary has been proved."

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Part-XV

Rabindranath Tagore and Sarodotsav

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was a Brahmo by birth but his universalism made him an admirer of all religions which led to the realisation of God. He refused to be bullied into the narrow confines of orthodox Brahmoism that advocated the worship of a formless deity or *'Nirakar Brahma'*, only. To Tagore, both the form and formless worship of God were valid for both aspired to the attainment of ethereal bliss through the realisation of God and his creations. Thus, to the poet, idolatry or *'Sakar' worship*, was as much permissible as the formless or *Nirakar worship*, especially when the former aimed at the attainment of the Supreme Godhead through symbolism signified by the worship of idols. It was this belief that distanced him from the Brahmo Samaj which could not see eye to eye with his realisation. This is revealed in many of his letters to contemporary persons both within and outside the Samaj.

In a moving letter written to Hemantabala Devi from Santiniketan on 26th July, 1931, the poet expresses his disinclination to abide by all the norms of the Brahmo Samaj. And yet, such disinclination did not burden him at any time with a sense of guilt as he was convinced of the legitimacy and rationality of his stand.

Tagore's disinclination to be drawn into the folds of any dogmatic creed, like orthodox Brahmoism, is clearly exposed in another letter of his addressed to Hemantabala Devi on 8th November, 1932, where he confessed categorically that he did not consider himself to be a Brahmo in the strictest sense of the term. He refused to be drawn into the vortex of any religion through the rites of initiation, for he was apathetic towards being branded as the formal member of any established religious creed.

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Rather, he wished to delve deeply in those cultural traits of all religions that provided him with a feeling of universal happiness or bliss.[238]

What particularly inspired the poet about Durgotsav was the intense joy it brought about in the minds of the multitudes who worshipped the deity. This, again, touched the poet's heart to such an extent that he considered himself as one of that vast multitude participating in the festival which endowed their minds with love and compassion for their fellow beings. Idolatry lost all meaning amidst the cacophony of merriment which characterised Sarodotsav. It was this positive side of Durgotsav, this humanism, this spirit of love and compassion generated on the occasion, that touched the poet's heart, and breaking away from the shackles of stereotyped Brahmo orthodoxy, Tagore responded to the occasion by welcoming Durga Puja as an essential ingredient of the Bengali cultural ethos. To a poet whose mind was attracted by the theme of multi-culturism, the cultural side of Durgotsav stimulated his sensibilities making him welcome the festival with open arms.

In another letter written to Ramanuj Acharya Goswami from Khardah, near Calcutta, in 1927, the poet defends idolatry when such idolatry gives rise to pure human emotions.[239] And this was never more manifested on a greater grandiose scale than during Durga Puja celebrations of Bengal.

The poet's weakness for Durgotsav was fomented not merely by the strains of humanism, joy, and multiculturalism, that flowed in his very life-blood, but by the cultural antecedents in which he was raised since childhood. For although his father, Maharshi Debendranath, adopted Brahmoism and discarded idolatry, he could not prevent the celebration of Durgotsav by other members of his family at his ancestral house in Jorasanko, in North Calcutta. These family members followed traditional Hinduism in sharp contrast to Debendranath who forsook the Hindu creed.

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The celebration of Durgotsav at Jorasanko must have influenced the mind of young Rabindranath who with his latter-day multi-culturalism and rationalist humanism refused to be cowed down by the example of his father.

It would not be out of place here to discuss the celebration of Durga Puja at Jorasanko and its social mores that undoubtedly exerted a profound impression of young Rabindranath. Durgotsav celebrations commenced at Jorasanko from 1784 when Nilmoni Tagore, the famed ancestor of Rabindranath, established the Jorasanko line of the Tagore family as distinct from the Pathuriaghata line.[240]

The grandeur and glamour of Durgotsav at Jorasanko, of course, started from the time of Dwarkanath, who, however, on account of his being a staunch Vaishnav, prohibited animal sacrifice at his premises during the festival, allowing vegetable sacrifice before Goddess Durga, instead.[241] Indeed, Durgotsav had become such a part and parcel of religious life at Jorasanko from the time of Dwarkanath, that his son, Debendranath, in one of his speeches, categorically affirmed that in his childhood years he equated Devi Durga to God, especially during Durgotsav.[242] As the eldest son of Dwarkanath, Debendranath was usually deputed by his father to invite people to the Durgotsav held at his Jorasanko residence. Debendranath recalled his encounter with Raja Rammohan Roy on one such occasion and the embarassment evinced in the eyes of the latter when he was invited to Durgotsav at Jorasanko. Rammohan, as the founder of the Brahmo creed, had always castigated idolatry and hence his embarassment upon the receipt of the invitation. However, being aware of the intense smallness of age of Debendranath in which it was impossible for a person to form any judgement on the merits and demerits of idolatry, the Raja did not hurt the boy's sentiments by point-blank refusal. He despatched Debendranath to his son, Radhaprasad, who accepted the invitation on behalf

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of his father. The incident, recorded in *Debendranath Tagore's Memoirs*, or *'Atmacharit'*, is intensely revealing of the rift in contemporary Bengali Hindu Society over idolatry veering around the Durga Puja festival of the time.

Abanindranath Tagore records in vivid colours the euphoria that gripped the Jorasanko household at the time immediately preceding and during the progress of Durgotsav there. Special dresses were made for the male members of the house, both young and old, while the ladies were asked to choose from a variety of gorgeous sarees of numerous attractive shades and colours.[243]

The images of Durga and her associates, Laxmi, Saraswati, Ganesh and Kartick, along with Mahisasura, etc., were formed by numerous artisans hired by the Tagores. The construction work took place within their own premises at Jorasanko where almost everybody derived intense pleasure in watching the entire process of image-making. This has been revealed vividly by Satyendranath Tagore, an elder brother of Rabindranath.[244] The image of Durga, at Jorasanko was decked in golden ornaments every year, and these were not removed during immersion. This is clearly evinced in the annals of Kshitindranath Tagore, a very important member-cum-observer of the Tagore household. According to the same authority, these ornaments might have been removed from the image of the Goddess during the Bisarjan or immersion by either the boatmen or junior employees of the Tagore household, but they were never returned to the familial coffers at Jorasanko, for, according to ancestral custom, the Goddess had to be decked with new gold ornaments each year. Such was the lavish propensity of the Tagores of Jorasanko during Durgotsav.

Preparation for Durgotsav at Jorasanko commenced almost two or three months prior to the actual festival. This was recorded by Saudamini Devi, the eldest daughter or Debendranath,

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according to whom, the family tailor started frequenting the premises from thence in order to make new dresses for the inmates, both male and female. The grand old lady throws momentous light on the different fashions donned by the young female members of the Tagore household who adorned themselves with golden ornaments during daytime and costly gems at night, during Durgotsav.

The spirit of gaiety that prevailed at Jorasanko during the festival must have attracted young Rabindranath's mind, and perhaps filled his inner ambience with a subtle bias for Sarodotsav as reflected in his later writings and actions. For while on a visit to his ancestral zamindari at Shilahidaha, (now in Bangladesh), on one occasion, the poet himself took the initiative in organising a Fair which he dedicated to *Kattyayani*, another name of Goddess Durga. The Fair which was held in 1902, was embellished with numerous cultural and musical programmes. Details of the Fair and the poet's role in its creation have been scrupulously attested by Sachindranath Adhikari who was then officiating as the Manager of the Shilahidaha zamindary of the Tagores.[245] The *mela* or Fair which continued to be held for several years after 1902, came to be called *'Kattyayani Mela'* after the poet's wish.

The celebration of Vijaya Dashami at Jorasanko, so wonderfully attested by Saudamini Devi and Satyendranath Tagore in their memoirs, with its train of salutations (viz. *kolakuli* in Bengali parlance), musical soirees and theatricals, and the ensuing spirit of bonhomie generated immediately after the immersion ceremony, undoubtedly touched a chord in the heart of young Rabindranath, who resolved to toe a different line from his father, vis-a-vis Durgotsav. Rather, he was more amenable to the views of his uncle, Nagendranath, the youngest brother of Maharshi, to the effect that as Durgotsav was more of a social ritual rather than a purely religious one, acting as a meeting ground for old friends and relatives, its obliteration would entail

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a lot of mental suffering among such folk.[246] It was this spirit of gaiety and social bonhomie generated on the occasion which distanced the young poet from the views on the subject advanced by his father and the Brahmo Samaj. Again, it was this feeling which prompted the poet to write a spirited letter to his son-in-law, Nagendranath Ganguly, defending the ritualism of *Kolakuli* on the occasion of Vijaya Dashami which fostered love and brotherhood between man and man and caused the promotion of friendship on a permanent basis.[247]

The poet, in conformity with his feelings, accepted Vijaya salutations from younger relatives and friends, while blessing them on this auspicious occasion. This was revealed in Maitreyee Devi's Bengali book entitled *'Swarger Kacha Kachi'* and that of his niece Indira Devi Chaudhurani, as well as in Rani Chanda's reflections on him in her eminent Bengali book entitled *'Gurudev'*. This feeling, again, was focussed in a letter the Poet wrote to Nirmal Kumar Mahalnobis on 14th October, 1939.[248]

The general feeling of grief and despondency following the departure of Durga for Mount Kailash, which Vijaya brought in its train, did not fail to touch the heart of Tagore who, in a letter written to Indira Devi Chaudhurani on 22nd October, 1894, gave vent to his feelings of despair and remorse on the occasion.

This apart, references to Goddess Durga were made by Tagore in many of his prose writings and poetical compositions.

The lure of autumn heralding Durgotsav had a special significance for the poet whose mind became surcharged with ecstacy on witnessing the season unfold itself in its rich verdant hue. The rich harvest of the season, (symbolised by the sun-kissed ripened paddy fields), coupled with the azure blue sky, were ideal combinations for welcoming the Goddess, who graced the occasion with the music of *Agamani*. The lush scenario of autumn was marvellously depicted by the Poet in an unforgettable song which began thus :—

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"আজি ধানের ক্ষেতে রৌদ্র-ছায়ায়,
লুকোচুরির খেলা রে ভাই
লুকোচুরির খেলা।
নীল আকাশে কে ভাসালে
সাদা মেঘের ভেলা।।"

In a poem, Tagore's address of welcome to the Goddess amidst the scintillating autumnal milieu is highly evocative and well explicit, thus :—

"এস গো শারদলক্ষ্মী, তোমার
শুভ্র মেঘের রথে,
এসো নির্মল নীল পথে,
এসো ধৌত শ্যামল
আলো ঝলমল
বনগিরি পর্বতে।
এসো মুকুটে পরিয়া শ্বেত শতদল
শীতল-শিশির ঢালা।"

Here শারদলক্ষ্মী (Sarada-Laxmi) is none other than Devi Durga whom the poet adores. Durga seems to have hypnotised Rabindranath whose mind she had filled with unfathomable enchantment and ecstacy.

The joy envinced at Durga's home-coming was shared by another contemporary eminent Muslim poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, who welcomed the Devi (viz. Goddess) of the seductive autumnal season, thus :—

"শাপলা শালুকে সাজাইয়া সাজি
শরতে শিশিরে নাহিয়া।
শিউলি রঙিন শাড়ি পরে ফেরো
মাগো আগমনী গীতি গাহিয়া।"

Thus, the Goddess was not only for Hindus, but for Muslims as well. The universalism which She stood for did not differentiate

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between Hindus and Muslims but encompassed within its fold both communities. Durga did not differentiate between man and man on the basis of religious affiliations. It is this spirit of universalism, breaking across caste and communal barriers, which fostered a sense of humanism and one-ness among men, so tragically ruptured by the vicious ego of communalism witnessed especially in the forties of the last century, and is still rupturing communal amity in our sub-continent today. Only the dissemination of Devi Durga's message of universal love among the masses and its whole-hearted adoption by them can render communal harmony a reality these days.

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Part-XVI

Conclusion

Durga is also named as Gauri. Gauri is synonymous to an eight-year old maiden. And yet at nine, Gauri got married to old Shiva. The marriage of Gauri or Durga at such a young age to an old groom was, however, not an uncommon feature in Bengal, nay the whole of India, in centuries gone by, when child-marriage was rampant in society. The prevalence of Kulin polygamy in Bengal with young dames being given in marriage to aged Kulin Brahmins was evanescent in Durga's matrimony with the aged Kulin, Shiva, who was considered by all as the best Kulin consort for Her. However, Lord Shiva, as Durga's groom, did not satisfy the expectations of Her parents, Giriraj and Menoka, for He was found on most occasions to be too absorbed in his meditations or in begging, to take care of his pretty young wife. This ignited the ire of Her parents, particularly Her Mother, who on one occasion expressed her determination not to let her daughter return to her husband's home when once She set foot on Her ancestral edifice. This desire of Menoka which was also reflective of similar desires of many Mothers of child-brides in past epochs has been wonderfully epitomised in a heart-rending song of Menoka to the following effect :—

"কেমন করে হরের ঘরে
ছিলে উমা বল মা তাই।
জামাই নাকি ভিক্ষা করে
মায়ের প্রাণে কি ধৈর্য্য ধরে,
এবার নিতে এ'লে বলব হরে
উমা আমার ঘরে নাই।।"[249]

"(*How could Uma live happily with Hara, viz. Shiva, when the latter eked out a miserable living through begging? A Mother*

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cannot tolerate such plight of her daughter. Therefore, when Shiva comes here to fetch his wife, I will say that she is not at home.)"

The plight of Durga or Uma as depicted in the song, was, however, not uncommon in Bengal, vis-a-vis young child-wives who were very often the objects of neglect by their much senior husbands, and Durga, as a child-bride was, thus, not an exception to this phenomenon of neglect. And, yet, alike most child-wives who remained faithful to their husbands despite utter deprivation and neglect, Devi Durga stood steadfastly by Her aged spouse which characterised married Bengali womenfolk who displayed unique fidelity and devotion to their often neglectful consorts. *This spirit of fidelity makes Durga an essentially Bengali stereotype.* Lord Shiva, Himself, tested this fidelity in Durga, and was touched by Her loyalty to Him.[250] The Bengali womens' craving from times immemorial for Shiva-like husbands evolved out of a type of personal equation with Devi Durga. Durga had withstood conjugal neglect while simultaneously reverencing Shiva. Bengali womens' craze for Shiva-like husbands sprang from their Durga-like spirit of withstanding conjugal neglect stoically with simultaneous bestowal of love, affection, and loyalty on their marital partners. Feminists today would dub such loyalty and devotion as an anachronism, but Bengali women of previous centuries did not have modern or post-modern *'Feminist'* friends to point out this anachronism. And, thus, conjugal loyalty persisted. Divorce, which is common today, was rare in pre-20th century Bengali society and family bonds were tightly knit even amidst the vicissitudes of conjugal neglect. This was, of course, neither praiseworthy nor laudable. However, it ensured a sort of familial peace, although in the context of husbandal apathy, such peace was bound to rest on impermanent or artificial foundations.

As the mistress of infinite space Durga towers supreme over the entire universe. As the purger of evil the Goddess manifests

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Herself in her ten-armed or Dashabhuja form destroying all evil-doers and effacing the darker aspects of human nature signified by greed, lust, ignorance and revenge. In uprooting evil She is merciless, and does not hesitate to use the mighty weapons She had been endorsed with against her detractors. For She has no non-violent mission and no Hindu Goddess as the deity personifying power or Shakti ever stands passivistic in Her attitude. The weapons in Her hands are really a blessing in disguise, for it is primarily with their help that She is able to chastise the evil-doers who oppress the righteous. These weapons, standing for piety and honesty always keep up the balance against the encroachment of evil. Durga, therefore, does not cultivate Gandhian non-violence as this often leads to the emergence of chaos in society flowing from excessive leniency.

In the words of J. K. Sen :—

> "The deities of Hinduism are not represented as mincing matter, and are not, therefore, conceived as shy in taking up a realistic view of happenings. The evil-doers must die. It is a question of struggle between two opposites, and the forces of honesty and piety should triumph."[251]

As the destroyer of evil, Goddess Durga is credited with the annihilation of all the odious consequences of evil that plague the human race. Thus the appellation of *Durgatinashini* is attached to her name. Such phenomenas as war, femine, and subjugation to foreign rule, which brought forth manifold sufferings upon mankind, could be easily and quickly dispelled through her ethereal intervention, and it was this belief which prompted distressed folks to invoke Her to seek speedy redemption from multiple socio-economic or political maladies throughout the ages. The foregoing pages provide vivid details of such maladies in the shape of British rule in India, the Second World War, the Bengal Famine of 1943, along with the proliferation of Hindu-Muslim communalism, prior to the partition of India. The Devi

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was constantly invoked for redress on these fronts and this feature in Bengali society was vividly flashed by the local newspapers of the time, particularly the Ananda Bazar Patrika, and the Amrita Bazar Patrika.

Durga as the vortex of political activities, particularly the freedom struggle in India, witnessed numerous nationalist rallies organised near the important Sarbajanin Puja areas of Calcutta. As a destroyer of evil, She was looked upon by Indians, particularly Bengali nationalists, as an inspiring symbol, urging them on in their crusade against British misrule. Neither did they forget Her on the attainment of their cherished freedom in 1947, for the Durga Puja festivities in the city and its suburbs in that year witnessed scenes of euphoria and hilarity never witnessed before with people of all walks of life thanking the Goddess for independence, the desire for which She had indirectly inculcated in men. Her inspiration, people divined, had made it possible for Indians to achieve freedom.

Communal politics centering around the Goddess, was, of course, extremely reprehensible and unfortunate, and for this the blame must fall not on all Muslims, en-masse, but only on a section of Wahabi-inspired fundamentalist Musalmans imbued with the reactionary mentality of Pakistan.

The rise of modern Hindutva in India is a direct consequence of Islamic fundamentalism which still persists in the country in an alarming fashion.

It was extremely unfortunate that Durgotsav should have been the focus of communal tension, especially when Muslims from times immemorial paid their homages to the Goddess whose universalism transcended all man-made communal barriers. Praises should however be bestowed on those individuals, politicians and political and cultural forums in Bengal who or which endeavoured to avert communal disturbance on this count.

As for the man-made Bengal Famine of 1943, Durga was

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seen as one of the most reliable deities who could extricate the affected folk from the throes of hunger and doom. The constant invocations made to Her by dying and distressed people for relief in the tormentous times of 1943 reveal the faith placed on her by a large cross-section of people. That most of their prayers remained unanswered, is, of course, a different matter, altogether. But Her propitiation by Bengal's starving millions is enough testimony of Her mass popularity.

Mass petitions were similarly made to the Goddess to end the Second World War which brought in its train man-slaughter of a stupendous kind. Here, the leadership was taken by eminent political forums of the country backed by famous newspapers who publicly invoked Durga to bring the menace of that war to an end.

The transformation from household Durgotsav to Baroari and later on to Sarbajanin Durga Puja, particularly in Calcutta and the mofussil, makes interesting reading. Although household Sarodotsav or Durgotsav still prevails in the city and in some moffussil areas today, the main thrust is now on community or Sarbajanin Pujas with clubs vying with one another in the display of lavish ostentation on the occasion followed by the spectre of all-round seasonal gaiety.

Puja gaiety in the period under review was reflected in the huge crowds frequenting Puja pandals and their exuberance despite the adversities of the weather or the black-out during Second World War-years. It is this exuberance, coupled with distant travel on the occasion, together with numerous Fairs held during Durgotsav, that lend lustre to Bengal's principal national festival till today. Ma Durga symbolises universalism as opposed to fundamentalism. She rises above all sectarian barriers, and as shown in the foregoing pages was worshipped by both rich and poor. It is this universalism which the Goddess symbolises that is required today to bring order to a world ridden by conflict and

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chaos brought about through fragmentation of society on the basis of caste, creed, religion, race and, above all, wealth.

The influence of Durgotsav on Tagore clearly exhibit the cosmopolitan working in the poet's mind. That the spirit of the festival made him rise above the morbid orthodoxy of the Brahmo clan, is also, in a sense, the by-product of Durga's hypnotic universalism which enticed the poet with a spirit of joy which Brahmoism failed to nurture in his heart.

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2. Chitralekha Singh and Prem Nath : *'Hindu Festivals, Fairs, And Fasts'*; New Delhi, 1999, p. 53.
3. Swami Prajnananda : *'Mahisasuramardini Durga'*; Calcutta, 2002; pp. 284-385 (In Bengali).
   Appendix No. 2 entitled, *"Raja Kanshanarayan O Bange Pratham Durgotsav"*. Appendix encloses a full article of Manilal Bandopadhyay which was published in 1976 in the month of Kartick (Bengali) in a Bengali Journal entitled *'Prabartak'*.
   There is a popular tradition which, however, states that for the first time after the Vedic age, Maharaja Krishnachandra of Krishnagar in Bengal celebrated the Durga Puja. But documentary evidence pinpoints to the greater probability and authenticity of Manilal Bandopadhyay's version. Pranab Bandopadhyay in his book *'Mother Goddess Durga'*; published from Calcutta in 1987, p. 62, gives both views on the subject. He equates Tahirpur with Tripura in Bengal.
4. Bimal Chandra Dutta : *'Durga Puja, Sakal Theke Akal' (In Bengali)*; Calcutta, 1986, pp. 37-40.
5. Ibid., p. 37.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 38.
9. Ibid., p. 39.
10. Bairagya Chakravarti : *'The Origin And Evolution of Durga Puja Festival : A Brief Historical And Sociological Survey'*. (Article published in Sunil Kumar Nag (edited) *'Popular Festivals of India'*; Calcutta, 1983; p. 70.
11. *'Mahisasura Mardini Durga'*; op. cit.; p. 243.
12. Ibid.; p. 242.
    Usually spring was the time when Gods & Goddesses in the Hindu pantheon were awake. According to the Hindu Shastras,

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these deities stayed awake for 6 months in the year and slept for the rest 6 months. As autumn was the resting or sleeping season of these deities among whom Durga was one, She had to be woken up to be propitiated at this untimely season. This awakening of the Goddess at this untimely period was done through the *Bodhan* ceremony, which was characterised as *Akal Bodhan*, being conducted in an untimely *(Akal)* season.

13. Chitralekha Singh and Prem Nath : *'Hindu Festivals, Fairs, And Fasts'*; New Delhi, 1999, p. 54.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. *'Mahisasuramardini Durga'*; op. cit., p. 246.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Kshitimohan Sen : *'Devi Pujar Vaidik Mantra'* (Article in the Ananda Bazar Patrika, Saradiya Number, B.S. 1354); p. 11.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.; p. 10.
22. Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan : *'Devi Durga' (Article in Autumnal or Saradiya Number of Bengali journal, Basumati*
23. See for details of Durga's slaying of Mahisasura in three successive incarnations, article by Prof. Asoknath Sastri, Vedantatirtha, entitled, *'Mahisasura Mardini'*, in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, dated, 29th September, 1940.
24. Ibid.
25. See Chitralekha Singh and Prem Nath in *'Hindu Festivals, Fairs and Fasts'*, op. cit.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.; p. 53.
28. Account of Vamana Puran as depicted by Pranab Bandopadhyay in his book, *'Mother Goddess Durga'*, Calcutta, 1987; pp. 35-36.
29. *Mahisasuramardini Durga,* op. cit., p. 216.
30. Ibid.; p. 241.
31. Ibid.

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32. See for a detailed description of Parvati's killing of demon Durgama as portrayed in the Skanda Purana, Pranab Bandopadhyay, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
33. Chitralekha Singh and Prem Nath, op. cit., p. 54.
34. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 2, 1941, p. 6. Editorial captioned *'The Day of Victory'*.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. See Pranab Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p. 7.
39. Ibid, p. 8.
40. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 21, 1947. Article by J. K. Sen entitled *'Sree Durga—Goddess of Infinite Space'*.
41. Pranab Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p. 8.
42. J. K. Sen's article in Amrita Bazar Patrika, op. cit.
43. Ibid. The second chapter of the Chundee describes Her as covering all the three worlds with Her hands, while in the fourth chapter, again, (S. 1.27) it has been said that Her form envelops the three known worlds.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid : In the analysis of J. K. Sen :—
"It is significant that She (viz. Durga) is associated with Goddess Mahakali, too, in a remarkable way. Modern researches have offered several data and findings to evaluate the relationship of these two dimensions of experience in their material bearings. One wonders how these could be foreseen and fathomed at such an early period of history. While time and space are conceived in their separate roles, modern speculations never take them as absolutes. Space–Time is a concept of modern physics formulated mathematically by Munkowsky and employed in the theories of Lorentz and Einstein. Space and Time are not taken today as independent of each-other but united in a four-dimensional world made up of point instants or events. Every part is correlated with an instant of time so that in every point there is a fourth co-ordinate, e.g., time."

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47. Pranab Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p. 9.
48. Sri Swami Sivananda : *'Hindu Fasts And Festivals'; (Fourth edition)*, Published by Divine Life Society, Shivanandanagar; District Tehri-Garhwal, U. P., Himalayas; 1983, p. 16.
49. Ibid, p. 18.
50. Ibid; p. 16.
51. Ibid; p. 10.
52. Ibid; p. 11.
53. Ibid. (The three worlds over which Mother Durga and Lord Siva rule, are *Sarga, Martya and Patal*, viz., heaven, earth and the ocean depths.)
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid; p. 18.
56. Ibid; p. 19.
57. Ibid; pp. 19-20.
58. Pranab Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p. 9.
59. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 27, 1941. Article by unknown writer, captioned, *"Durga Puja : Meaning And Significance of Hindu Symbolism."*
    Dwelling on the value of Hindu Symbolism, vis-a-vis the Durga Puja, the correspondent, poking fun at Brahmos and other rationalists who view Durga Puja as mere superstitious idolatry, states :—
    "To the unimaginative it may be idolatry. To the rationalist it may be superstition. But to the student of the processes through which the spirit of man gradually rise to the realisation of his Maker, these symbolisms have a supreme educative and cultural value."
60. Ibid.
61. Pranab Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p. 13.
62. Ibid., pp. 13-14. Bandopadhyay dwells on numerous names of the Goddess with their reference to the Shakti cult. According to him :—
    "The name, *Kundalini*, of the Goddess came from the Shakti cult. The word, *'Kundala'* (viz. coil) is used in the practice of *Yoga Kundalini* with reference to the six chakras (wheels

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on the paths of *Ananda* or the supreme bliss) of the human body. The Goddess is also known as *Bhujangini* (serpent) because when She is asleep, She remains inactive, and Her energy is coiled like a snake. *Kundalini* (the female vital force for creation) is the Supreme *Parameshwari* (or Sovereign Lady). As She holds the mystery of creation, the name, *Mahamaya,* (Divine Illusion) is also given to Her. Another well-known synonym of *Prakriti* (primordial female energy) is *Maya* (i.e., illusion)".

63. Ibid, p. 14.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid; p. 24.
67. Ibid; p. 25.
68. Amrita Bazar Patrika; 27th September, 1941. Editorial entitled:— *'Come O Mother'.*
69. Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., p. 56. See also Pallav Sengupta's Bengali article entitled *'Ghotakbahana : Kichu Prasna, Kichu Sangsay'* in the Durga Number of Bengali quarterly journal *'Lok Sanskriti Gabesana'* dated B. S. Shravan-Aswin, 1407; pp. 315-316.
70. Ibid., See Also Premtosh Dey's Bengali Article entitled *'Devi Durgar Marte Agaman, Gaje Mangal, Dolay Marak, Keno'* in Saptahiki Bartaman dated 12 October, 2002, pp. 15-16.
71. Amarendranath Saha : *'Dev-Devir Swarup Murtipuja O Bahanrahsya'; (In Bengali)*; Calcutta, 2001; p. 123.
72. Dr. Roma Chaudhuri : *'The Spiritual Basis of Sri Sri Durga Puja'; (Article)* in Sunil Kumar Nag (edited), *'Popular Festivals of India',* Calcutta, 1983, p. 17.
    In the words of Dr. Roma Chaudhuri :—
    "We all know what this festive side of Sri Sri Durga Puja means to us. But we often forget about its deeper, purer, higher spiritual aspect in our merriments, and bring it down to the level of an ordinary festival."
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid, p. 19.

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75. Ibid. In the words of Roma Chaudhuri :—
"Knowledge must lead to something else, something higher, viz., Bliss-Jnana to Ananda. This is the beauty of the soul, the Atman; and this kind of beauty, spiritual beauty alone, is something eternal, something desirable, something beneficial."
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Jaya Chaliha and Bunny Gupta, op. cit., p. 331.
81. Ibid.
82. Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., pp. 113-114. About the presence of Governor General Lord Bentinck and Lord Cambermere, in the Durga Puja celebrations at the Shovabazar residence of the Debs, the *Bengal Harkaru, dated 12th October, 1827* records:—
"At about ten O'clock Rajas Shibkrishen and Kalikrishen with their brotheis had the great honour of receiving Lord Cambermere's suite shortly after which came in Lord and Lady Bentinck with their suites, when *'God Save The King'* was struck up, and their Lordships were seated on a golden sofa, placed at the centre of the *'Nautch'* place. The 'nautches' greatly pleased their Lordships and her Ladyship."
83. Ibid., pp. 115-116.
84. The metallic image of Durga, established in 1782 by the founder of the Bhukailash zamindari family, Maharaja Bahadur Joynarayan Ghoshal, is still worshipped by his descendants in the Khidderpur residence of the Bhukailash family. Here although Durga is worshipped daily, the four Puja days of autumn, mark the time for her special worship when family members assemble in the house, and gaiety and mirth follows. Ibid., pp. 116-117.
85. Ibid; p. 117.
86. Ibid; p. 119.
87. Ibid; p. 120.
88. Ibid; p. 121.
89. Ibid; pp. 120-121.

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90. Ibid; pp. 121-122.
91. Ibid; p. 122.
92. Ibid; p. 123.
93. Ibid; p. 124.
94. Ibid; p. 125.
95. Ibid. The origin of this Puja is very interesting, and its antecedents can be traced to the Puja organised by the Debs of Shovabazar, which Kaliprasanna used to frequent every year. On one occasion, an organiser expressed his inability to feed the guests owing to the paucity of funds. Taking great umbrage at this insult, Kaliprasanna decided to organise Durga Puja celebrations in his own home from the following year.
96. Ibid; pp. 125-126.
97. Ibid; p. 132.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid; p. 133.
100. Ibid; p. 134.
101. Ibid; p. 135.
102. Ibid; pp. 136-137.
103. Ibid.
104. Kaliprasanna Sinha : *'Hutum Penchar Naksha'*, (In Bengali); Calcutta, 1861, Chapter entitled *'Durgotsav'* consulted, revised Bengali edition, published in (B. S. 1391), by Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, and jointly edited by Brajendranath Bandopadhyay and Sajani Kanto Das; pp. 113-123.
105. Dinendra Kumar Ray : *(Pallichitra)*, (1904); Section on *'Durgotsav'*, as quoted in Sanat Kumar Mitra's Bengali article, entitled, *'Durga, Phire Dekha'*, in Bengali journal entitled, *'Lok Sanskriti Gabeshana' (B. S. Shravan Aswin 1407), (Vol. 13, No. 2)*, published by the *Research Institute of Folk Culture*, West Bengal, pp. 177-184.
106. Indranath Bandopadhya : *'Panchu Thakur Tritiya Kandya'*, quoted in *Lok Sanskriti Gabeshana*, op. cit., pp. 184-185.
107. See excerpts of Bipinchandra Pal's essay, in Sanat Kumar Mitra's article entitled, *'Durga Phire Dekha', in Lok Sanskriti Gabeshana*, op. cit.; pp. 186-187.

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108. Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., p. 91.
109. Ibid; pp. 110-111.
110. Ibid; p. 111.
111. Jaya Chaliha and Bunny Gupta, op. cit., p. 332.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid; p. ১১১. Such coloured veil was made from very thin and light aluminium sheets, almost resembling paper, which was manufactured at a factory at Krishnagar, Nadia, near Calcutta. See Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., p. 72.
114. Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., p. 138.
115. Ibid.
116. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 29, 1940; Editorial captioned *'Sakti'*. The editorial enunciates the militant message of Devi Durga in the following words :—

> "The Goddess makes the supreme appeal to us, who claim to be the inheritors of an ancient civilisation, in this that She does not discard the employment of physical power to overcome brute force. But She emphasises at the same time that the ultimate object is not the conquest of brute force but the attainment of that spiritual height which ennobles and sanctifies even earthly weapons...It is by the conquest of brute force by superior material power sanctified by spiritual idealism that wealth, learning and prowess can be achieved. That which is *Satya* (truth), and *Siva* (good) can only be achieved by the powerful and not by the powerless. There can be no peace by non-resisting evil. The evil is to be fought out, aye, with the very weapons that are earthly and of the earth : But the ultimate objective must be the inspiring motive and this objective is truly spiritual."

117. Bairagya Chakraborty, op. cit., p. 71.
118. Ibid.
119. Ibid., p. 72.
120. Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., p. 139.
121. Ibid., p. 138.
122. Ibid; pp. 144-145.

The young men who organised the Nebubagan Durgotsav Baroari

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were Nilmoni Ghose, Batukbehari Chattopadhyay, Dinendranath Chattopadhyay, C. K. Sarkar and Ramkali Mukhopadhyay.

123. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 9, 1937.
124. Ibid; October 17, 1947.
125. Ibid; September 30, 1946.
126. Ibid; October 19, 1947. At the function, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh officers of INA were present.
127. Ibid, September 29, 1941.
'Rakhi' or *'Raksha'* Bandhan ceremony was one where womenfolk tied the wrists of men with sacred threads to protect them in their campaign against foreign rule. The particular ceremony was one where the womenfolk tying the Rakhis were considered as sisters, while the menfolk on whose wrists these Rakhis were tied as brothers. This is a particular ceremony with strong nationalist overtones dating back to historical times.
128. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 28, 1941.
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid. According to Tushar Kanti Ghose :—
> "We should do all we can to revive our now extinct cottage industries and make special efforts to produce such things which, though necessaries in our life, have, to our shame, to be imported from foreign countries. Our Puja of the Goddess of Shakti (Strength) would be futile if we did not acquire physical strength, and such exhibitions being instrumental in awakening our responsibilities in this matter were rendering a very useful service to our countrymen."
131. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 28, 1941.
132. Ibid.
133. Ahiritola Sarbajanin Durgotsav in 1941. Noted personalities who spoke at the opening ceremony included Phanindranath Brahma, the Mayor of Calcutta, Sir Hari Sankar Paul, KCIE, the permanent President of Ahiritala Sarbajanin Durgotsav Committee, Sukhen Chatterjee, Sukumar Mitra, Beni Madhab Chatterjee, Pandit Krishna Chandra Vedanta Chintamony, etc.
134. Sovabazar Bartola Sarbajanin Durgotsav, in 1941. Speakers on the occasion included Sir Hari Sankar Paul and Sukumar Mitra,

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the latter delivering a very impressive lecture on the political and social significance of Goddess Durga in India.

135. Amrita Bazar Patrika; October 21, 1947. The public address of Dr. Prafulla Ghose to the gathering of Dhobis took place on Mahastami Day, viz. 22nd October, at 6-30p.m. The newspaper, however, does not furnish any details of the speech of Dr. Ghosh.
136. Bimal Chandra Dutta, op. cit., p. 145.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid; p. 146.
139. Ibid; p. 147.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.
143. Ibid; p. 148.
144. Ibid; pp. 148-149.
145. Ibid; p. 149.
146. Ibid, p. 149. The prime organisers of the Maddox Square Sarbajanin Durgotsav, in 1936, were Sudhansu and Jyotsna Ganguli, Saroj Bagchi, Sunit Sarkar, and Sarat Sashi Basak. The first President of this Puja committee was Mr. Mohini Kanto Ghatak.
147. Ibid, p. 150, originally this Puja started in 1939 at Hindusthan Road under the name of *'Hindusthan Road Sarbajanin Durgotsav'*, the first organisers being Purnendu Kumar Das, Dinesh Datta, A. K. Som, Purnachandra Sen, and others.
148. Ibid, p. 150. The first organisers were Subol Bardhan, Biswajit Chattopadhyay, Gourisankar Bandopadhyay and Dhirendranath Ghose *(President)*.
149. Ibid, p. 151. Among the first organisers of Sanghasree Sarbajanin Durgotsav were Pradyut Kumar Banerjee, Gouripada Banerjee, Sambhu Banerjee, Kalidas Das, Lalit Chakravorty and Siddheswar Mukherjee, etc.
150. Besides this community Durgotsav, another Puja, namely the Talligunge Sarbajanin Durgotsav, at 52/B, Russa Road, was held with much fanfare and ostentation. In 1937, at this Puja ground, a Health and industrial exhibition was arranged by the Publicity

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Department, Calcutta Corporation, exhibiting charts and models. This particular Sarbajanin Durga Puja in Talligunge was held under the auspices of the Talligunge Citizens' Welfare League. In the same year an Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition was held under the auspices of the Gouribaria Sarbajanin Durgotsav in North Calcutta. This exhibition was inaugurated by Mr. J. C. Mukherjee, Chief Executive Officer of Calcutta Corporation, while Jnananjan Niyogi delivered a lecture on *'The Industrial Development of Bengal.'*

Again, in 1937, also, at the Sarbajanin Durga Puja organised at 16-B, Sibtala Lane, Narkeldanga, in North Calcutta, by Sakti Sangha Club, a health and hygiene exhibition was held for a full week, where Mr. Jogananda Mitter, Advocate and Secretary of Ward No. 29 Health Association, delivered a lecture on health with the aid of a Magic Lantern.

151. Amrita Bazar Patrika, dated 17th October, 1947.
152. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 27th September, 1941. News Item captioned *"Speaking About The Puja."*
153. Ibid.
154. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 29th September, 1941. Speaking of the crowds thronging the streets, the Patrika reported :—

> "The volume of crowds in the streets after nightfall reached the dimension of previous years. Hindus from all parts of India mingled with the local people testifying to the undying common sentiment which inspire the whole of Hindu India." Thus the festival assumed a pan-Indian Hindu outlook in 1941.

155. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 26, 1942. News item captioned *'Pankotsav'*.

Accorting to the correspondent :—

> "On the Dashami day, a novel feature of the Pankotsav was a Thakurdada, well dressed in modern Kabuli-fashioned Dhuti, grey moustache twisted up to the outer corners of the eyes, and white beards flowing down on to the knees. The grandchildren would pelt him with mud and in the meantime the drums would play to the tune of the Bengali song, *"Thakurdada, Pather Kada."*

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156. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 27th September, 1947, News item captioned *"Durga Puja Festival : Celebration In City And Suburbs."*

157. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September, 25, 1941.

158. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 27, 1944. News Item, captioned *"Universal Love, Message of Durga."*

159. Ibid. In Sarkar's estimation, just as in the Durgotsav, everybody irrespective of his social status could participate, so in industrial reconstruction or economic regeneration of the country everybody irrespective of their financial or social status had to participate. This issued from the principle of interdependence of industrial components in the industrial network of the nation. According to Sarkar :—

> "From field to factory, there were several links in the long chain of industrial process and if any link failed to work, the whole chain would become unworkable."

160. Ibid. According to Sarkar the true spirit of Shakti did not lie in destruction only, but in creation as well. In fact, the creative aspect of a person's life was more abiding and of a lasting value than the forces of mere destruction. The demand for what is creative in man had reached the world, and on all sides the call for creation and construction had become insistent.

161. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2nd October, 1944. Letter to the Editor captioned *'Puja Vacation Work For Students'*. The students were asked to gather information on the following subjects relating to their native villages, viz :—

1) Natural and geographical situation of the area, population, and the proportion of Hindus, Muslims, and scheduled castes.
2) Economic conditions—condition of irrigation and agriculture—main produces.
3) Main sources of livelihood and occupation.
4) Existing social and political organisations in the area, their objectives, work and strength.
5) Review of social and economic conditions before and after the Bengal Famine of 1943, and whether any development of the same had taken place till then.

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6) Details of the effects of the Second World War and the Bengal Famine of 1943 on the people, their present grievances, difficulties and needs.

Students were requested to submit their reports to the office of the Samsad at the College Street Market on their return to Calcutta after the Puja vacation.

162. Amrita Bazar Patrika, Friday, October, 17, 1947. Article entitled *"By The Way"*.

163. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 27, 1947. News item captioned *"Durga Puja and Id Festivals Pass Off Peacefully : Happy Scenes of Hindu-Muslim Brotherhood in Calcutta."*

164. One such poem was published in the Saradiya number of the eminent Bengali newspaper, Ananda Bazar Patrika, dated 25th September, 1935, which underplays the necessity of holding Sarodotsav at a time when the country was reeling under the throes of misery and destitution generated by foreign rule. The poem, entitled in Bengali, as *'এবারে হবে না পূজা'* or *'There will be No Puja This Year'*, composed by one Jyatindra Mohan Bagchi, was highly enthralling, and captured the minds of many nationalist-minded Bengali folks.

165. The Dola is something like a bamboo-made palanquin.

166. The editorial hints at the necessity of the Allied Forces for resisting tooth and nail the evil unleashed by Hitler, and predicts the ultimate downfall of Nazism at the hands of the Allied powers. Allied weapons, which would bring about the final liquidation of Hitler, would be synonymous to Durga's weapons which acted as the dispeller of cruelty unleashed by brute force. In the words of the editorial :—

> "There can be no peace by non-resisting evil. The evil is to be fought out, aye, with the very weapons that are earthly and of the earth."
>
> And again :—
>
> "It is by the conquest of brute force by superior material power sanctified by spiritual idealism that wealth, learning and prowess can be achieved. That which is *Satya* (truth) and *Siva* (good), can only be achieved by the powerful and

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not by the powerless. This truth is inculcated in the magnificent image of the Goddess...It is this truth which brings happiness and power to which we will offer our homage. This truth is not for Hindus, alone, but for the whole human race."

167. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 25th September, 1941. News item captioned *"Special Durga Puja"*.
Among those who attended this Special Durga Puja ceremony were, Mr. K. C. Bose, Chief Air Raid Warden, Mr. Sunil Kanti Ghose, Additional Chief Air Raid Warden, Mr. D. N. Sen, Civic Guard Commandant, the Vice-Presidents of the Committee organising this Special Durga Puja, with all officers of Civic Guards, Shampukur, and Mr. C.E.S Fairweather, the Police Commissioner.

168. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 29th September, 1940. News item captioned *"Puja Pointers"*. The correspondent compares the belligerence generated by the Second World War to the Puja efforts of the Bengalis in a rather humorous way, thus :—

"While the belligerants are frantically engaged in intensifying their war efforts, we have to concentrate all our attention on Puja efforts which are hardly less strenuous in character. Bara-babus, housewives, and those fastidious children of today have to be propitiated, for family peace, like world peace, depends on individual contentment. And a heroic attempt has to be made to compel every rupee to yield seventeen annas."

169. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 28, 1941. News item captioned, *"Less Gaiety and Spirit : Durga Puja Celebrations in The City : Smaller Crowds."*

170. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 29, 1944. Editorial captioned *"Vijaya"*.

171. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 21, 1947. Editorial captioned *"Come Mother, Come"*. Durga delivered the Suras from the tyranny of the Asuras following ardent supplications to Her.

172. Ibid.

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173. Ananda Bazar Patrika, Saradiya Number, dated (B.S.) 6th Aswin, 1345. Editorial captioned *'Bangalir Matri Puja'*.

174. See Asoknath Sastri's article entitled *'Mahisasuramardini'*, op. cit., for this point.
See also Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 2, 1941. Editorial, entitled *"The Day of Victory"*.

175. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 2, 1941. Editorial captioned *"The Day of Victory"*.

176. Ibid. The pangs of impending separation from Mother Durga at Vijaya Dashami proved almost unbearable for many eminent Bengalis of former days. Michael Madhusudhan Dutta, the Poet-laureate of Bengal, very often wished that the night of Navami would never end so that Vijaya Dashami might never come to separate the Goddess from Her earthly children. And on one occasion Mathurbabu, the son-in-law of Rani Rashmoni, refused to allow the immersion of the image of Durga worshipped at his Janbazar residence of Calcutta only to be dissuaded by Sri Ramkrishna Paramhamsa who was present on that occasion. This particular incident is recorded in the seventh chapter of the book, *'Sri Sri Ramkrishna Lila Prasanga'*, written by Swami Saradananda.
See also for a thorough exposition of this incident, Bengali daily *'Bartaman'*, dated 15th October, 2002 in an article by Pranabesh Chakravarti, entitled, *"Bejoya Dashami Te Debi Bisarjan : Akti Oitihashik Ghatana."*

177. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17th October, 1947. News item, captioned *"Rain Mars Puja Festival"*.

178. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2nd October, 1941. Editorial captioned *'The Day of Victory'*, op. cit.

179. According to Vijayavinandan :—
"Have you seen two men with waist lines measuring 80 inches meeting each-other on Vijaya Dashami? Their upper and lower realms remain miles apart when there is reciprocal radiation of warmth vie their enormously how far off? Shelly wrote of the desire of the moth for the star, and of the night for the morrow. It is the case with the upper parts of their bodies in the process of embrace."

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180. Amrita Bazar Patrika; 17th October, 1937. Editorial captioned *'Bijoya'*. In the language of the editorial :—

> "Although coming events do cast their shadows before, let us hope that the day is not far distant when what is today but a hope and an aspiration, (viz., *Independence*) will be a settled fact." The words *'coming events'* in the editorial indirectly referred to the twists and turns of colonial politics in the country.

181. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 17, 1947. Editorial entitled 'Vijaya'. According to the editorial :—

> "It is not the force of arms but the strength of the nation's spirit, that secured the quittal of the British from India. It will again be the strength of our spirit that will rid our country of the demon of communalism and the evils associated with it."

182. Loksanskriti Gabeshana *(Bengali Quarterly)* : Special Number on Durga and Bengali Folks, Volume 13, No. 2; (B.S.) Shravan-Aswin 1407; pp. 284-292.

183. Ibid; p. 286.

184. Nirad C. Chaudhuri : 'The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian', Bombay *(Jaico Publications)*, 1988; p. 66. According to Chaudhuri :—

> "The first signal for it (viz. animal sacrifice before the image of Durga), was the arrival of drummers, cymbal and gong-beaters, and other musicians, all Mussulmans, who took their stand on one side of the pavilion."

185. Kaji Abdul Waddud : *'Bangla Mussalmaner Katha'* (In Bengali) *(A collection of articles by Kaji Abdul Waddud)*; Calcutta, 2002. (Published by Mrittika in their series entitled *'Swadesh Samakal Granthamala, Volume 2)*. Article entitled *'Grihayuddher Prakkale'* : p. 81.

186. Ibid; pp. 80-81.

187. Loksanskriti Gabeshana, op. cit., pp. 287-288.

188. V. D. Sarvarkar's telegram to the President of Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, dated 5th October, 1941. See Amrita Bazar Patrika, dated 6th October, 1941.

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189. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 26, 1941. News item entitled, *'Durga Puja Processions : Widespread Resentment Against Bengal Governments' Orders.*
190. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 28th September, 1941, (news item captioned : *'Ban on Vijaya Processions : Magistrate's orders').*
191. Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 30, 1941.
News item captioned :—
"Dinajpur Procession Trouble : Magistrate's Order Contravened Principles Enunciated By Government : Sir M. N. Mukherjee's Reply To The Home Minister : Licences Being Issued in Recent Years To Curtail Hindu Rights."
192. Ibid.
193. Ibid. Statement of the Secretary of the Burdwan District Hindu Mahasabha, Srikumar Mullick, to the Press.
194. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 3rd October, 1941.
'By The Way'
Lamenting Hindu-Muslim tensions brewing from the passing of Hindu immersion processions with music before mosques', the correspondent states in no uncertain terms :—
"But what do we find today? If an immersion ceremony passes off peacefully without any hitch or trouble we take it as an achievement and it is reported in the press that the ceremony passed off peacefully in such and such places as if it were remarkable news."
195. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30th September, 1941.
News item captioned : *"Communal Unity Move."*
196. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 3rd October, 1941. News item captioned *Gloom in Mymensing.*
197. Ibid.
198. Ibid.
199. Ibid. News item captioned "All Bengal Protest Day, Sunday, October 5, *'Fasting, Mourning And Penance'.*
200. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5th October, 1941, News item captioned, *"The Govt. Action Condemned : Citizens' Demonstration : Orders Interfering With The Religious Rites Of The Hindus : Restrictions On Niranjan Processions : Protests Registered Against The*

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Reactionary Mentality Of Communally Minded Ministry". According to Durga Charan Vedantatirtha :—

> "The Durga Puja has been named as *Maha Puja* and this festival in this age had earned the distinction of being called the *'Aswamedha Yagna'*. From this the importance of the Puja would be well realised."

201. Ibid.
202. Ibid.
203. Ibid.
204. Ibid. In the words of a visibly agitated N. C. Chatterjee :—
"Today it was the duty of the Hindus to tell Khwaja Nazimuddin and his Pakistani friends that if any insult was meant towards the worship of their Mother Sakti, whose sons they were, they were not going to tolerate it. Nazimuddin was but their paid servant. His salary came from their money. A major portions of the money came from the Hindus. And they paid it because he must render impossible any injustice and oppression being done to them."
205. Ibid. To Swami Satyananda, mammoth meetings or emphatic protests were not enough. Hindus, according to him, should think of something more effective to counter the indignities heaped upon them by a communal Government. Otherwise, they would have to come to grief. The Swami, in conclusion, called upon Hindus to remember that while the commission of an injustice by the authorities was a heinous crime, its tolerance by the Hindus would be tantamount to a crime also, if such tolerance took place at all."
206. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6th October, 1941. News item captioned *"Ban on Immersion Processions Illegal and Unjust."* While the Hazra Park meeting was held under the chairmanship of barrister N. C. Chatterjee, the meeting at Wellington Square was chaired by Mahamahopadhaya Haridas Siddhantabagish.
207. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5th October, 1941. *The Bengal Hindu Students Federation* was the students' wing of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha.
208. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6th October, 1941.

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209. For a brilliant exposition of the communal riots in Dacca in 1941, see Suranjan Das's book entitled *'Communal Riots In Bengal, 1905-1947'*, (O.U.P), Delhi, 1991.
210. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30th September, 1944. News item captioned, *'By The Way'*.
211. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 19, 1945.
News Item captioned, *"One Killed And Twenty-Two Injured". Trouble Over Durga Puja Immersion At Lalmonirhat."*
212. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 21st, 1945. News item captioned: *'Durga images Remain Un-immersed : Protest Against Police Insistence On No Music On Road Where Mosque Stands.'*
213. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17th October, 1945. News item entitled, *"No Immersion Of Images."*
214. Ibid. The Patrika's news-coverage refers to telegrams despatched by the local Hindu leaders of Ramnagar to the Governor of Bengal, and Dr. Shyama Prosad Mukherjee, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, and other Hindu leaders of Bengal, seeking immediate help and guidance in the matter.
215. Ibid.
216. Ibid.
217. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19th October, 1945.
News item captioned *"100 Images Unimmersed"* Debendranath Mukherjee, General Secretary, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha's wire to Commissioner, Dacca Division, on 100 unimmersed Durga images at Rikabibazar Abdullahpur Union, Dacca.
218. Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 24, 1945. News Item captioned, *"Non Immersion of Durga Images : Mahasabha Representative Arrives In Dacca on Enquiry."*
219. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 3rd October, 1941. News Item captioned, *"Gloom in Mymensing"*, op. cit.
220. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, of 17th October, 1945, furnishes the names of the principal Muslim rioters in Baranagore, viz. :—
    a) Kedar Ali Sardar
    b) Dillo Sardar
    c) Idris Miyan

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d) Baja Mian
e) Idon Sardar
And
f) Muhammad Sami.

While Kedar Ali Sardar and Dillo Sardar were the residents of Baranagore Jute Mill Coolie lines, Idris Miyan, Baja Miyan and Idon Sardar belonged to Baranagore locality. Muhammad Sami hailed from outside.

221. See for details Suranjan Das' book entitled *'Communal Riots In Bengal 1905-1947'*, Delhi (OUP), 1991, pp. 165-167.
222. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 29th September, 1946. Front page news items captioned, *"Why This Softness For the Goondas?"* The news item contains Saheed Shurawardy's speech in the Bengal Assembly in reply to a speech of the leader of the opposition, Kiron Sankar Roy, calling upon both Hindus and Muslims to ensure a peaceful Durga Puja in Calcutta.
223. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 12th October, 1947. News item captioned, *"Lawlessness Will Be Put Down : Hindus To Be Allowed To Perform Pujas Peacefully."*
224. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17th October, 1947. News item captioned, *"Equal Opportunity To Celebrate Puja and Id."*
225. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 18th October, 1947. Front Page News item, captioned, *"Maintain Peace And Amity During Puja And Id : P. C. Ghose And Nazimuddin's Appeal To People : Prevailing Customs To Be Observed In Ceremonies : Public Urged To Make Leaders' Joint Tour A Success."*
226. Amrita Bazar Patrika. News Item captioned, *"Maintenance of Peace During Puja And Id : Dr. Ghose Addresses Conference of District Magistrates."*
227. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 15th October, 1947. News item captioned *"Responsibility Lies on Majority in Preserving Peace : Mr. Osman's Appeal For Undisturbed Puja & Id."*
228. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17th October, 1947. News item captioned, *'Durga Puja Processions : Calcutta Police Chief's Notification.'*
229. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19th October, 1947. News item captioned *"Preserve Peace During Puja and Id."*
230. Ibid. News item captioned : *'All Forces to be Mobilised to Preserve Peace : Puja-Id Week In Bengal : Joint Programme by*

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Leftist Parties."

231. Ibid. News item entitled *'Puja And Id'*.
232. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20th October, 1947.
233. Ibid. News item captioned *'Puja & Id Celebrations : Mr. Haq's Appeal to Calcutta Hindus & Muslims.'*
234. Ibid. News item captioned *'Humility, Peace And Religious Toleration : West Bengal Governor's Puja And Id Message.'*
235. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19th October, 1947. Editorial captioned *"Puja And Id"*.
236. Ibid. : News item captioned *"Maintenance of Peace : Durga Puja Festival : Call to Santi Senas to Volunteer Service."*
237. Ibid. New item captioned, *"Sandwip Muslims Encourage Erection of Durga Image For Worship."*
238. Tuhin Shubhra Bhattacharyya : *"Rabindra Bhavanay Durga"* (In Bengali); Calcutta, 1999, p. 76.
239. Ibid; p. 16. See also Tagore's *'Chithipatra'*.
240. Tuhin Shubhra Bhattacharyya, op. cit. p. 12.
241. Ibid. This was clearly reflected in the writings of Satyendranath Tagore, an elder brother of Rabindranath.
242. Ibid. See also for details Debendranath Tagore's *'Atmacharit'*.
243. Tuhin Shubhra Bhattacharyya, op. cit. p. 13. The variety of sarees included, Nilambari, Ganga-Jamuna, Chander-Alo, Kanta-Paar, Kokil-Paar, Sinthir-Sindur, etc.
244. Ibid.
245. Ibid; pp. 11-12. See also, for details, Sachindranath Adhikari's Bengali treatise entitled, *'Shilaidaha O Rabindranath'*.
246. Tuhin Shubhra Bhattacharyya, op. cit. p. 15.
247. Ibid; pp. 93-94. See also *'Chithipatra'*, op. cit., for details.
248. Tuhin Shubhra Bhattacharyya, op. cit. p. 93. See also *'Chithipatra'*, op. cit., for details.
249. Ananda Bazar Patrika, 25th September, 1935. *(Saradiya Number)* Article by Dwaresh Chandra Sharmacharya, entitled in Bengali *"Banglay Uma"* Here *'Hare'* in the song refers to Lord Shiva.
250. Ibid. On one occasion, to test Durga's fidelity for Him, Lord Shiva appeared before Her in disguise, and criticised many of His faults, only to be admonished by his unsuspecting wife.
251. J. K. Sen, op. cit. in Amrita Bazar Patrika, October, 21, 1937.

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ii) Article by Ananda Prosad Chatterjee captioned *'The Durga Puja'.*
iii) Editorial entitled *'Sakti'.*
iv) News item : *"Baghbazar Sarbajanin Durgotsav'.*
v) –Do– *'Puja Fashions And Puja Pointers'.*
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vii) –Do– : *'First Aid And Rescue Work : R.W.A.C's Arrangements During Pujas.'*

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(b) *'Puja Pragati'*, an article by Amiya Gupta.
(c) *'Durgotsav'*, a poem by Mohitlal Mazumdar.

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ii) *'Chotoder Pujabarsiki'*, by Partha Ghose.
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Appendix–I

From Statesman, October 4, 2000.
(Section 100 Years Ago).
October 4, 1900. (News Item).

Doorga Pooja Festivities. —Many of the leading Hindoo residents of Calcutta celebrated the Doorga Pooja with considerable pomp, as is their wont. These festivities last for a period of three days, a day being especially set apart for the reception of European guests. Among the native gentlemen who entertain on the occasion are the members of the Sobha Bazar Raj family, Baboo Ashutosh Dhur, and Baboo Gonesh Chunder Chunder. Maharaja Sir Norendra Krishna, the representatives of the family of the late Raja Sir Radha Kant Deb, and Baboos Ashutosh Dhur and Gonesh Chunder Chunder entertained a large party of their European friends which included several ladies, on Tuesday night. The entertainments consisted of nautches and native theatricals, which were much appreciated. Raja Benoy Krishna entertained a large gathering of his European friends, including many ladies, last night at his residence in Grey Street, which was brilliantly illuminated for the occasion. The entertainment here consisted of the performance of a Bengalee play entitled "Raj Singha" by the members of the Star Theatre in the courtyard below; while in the spacious hall upstairs, which was prettily decorated for the occasion, a band played English music, to the strains of which dancing was indulged in for some time. Refreshments were provided by M. Peliti.

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Appendix–II

From Statesman, October 22, 2001.
(Section 100 Years Ago).
October 22, 1901 (News Items).

The Durga Pujah in Calcutta. —Owing to a very large influx of natives from upcountry, the celebration of the Durga Pujah festival in Calcutta this year has been on a larger scale than formerly. For the last few days the streets have been thronged with natives, both male and female, the Hindu element predominating, and have presented quite an animated appearance. Thousands of devotees visited the Kalighat temple, while the Museum and Zoological Gardens were also very largely patronised. As usual, the Tramway Company made special arrangements to meet the rush, but this year their resources were severely taxed, the cars, especially those running through the native portion of the town, being packed. The tramcar drivers, conductors and inspectors chiefly felt the strain, as the cars, on this occasion, run all night and well into the small hours of the morning. The Tramways Company, however, proved equal to the occasion and their arrangements were highly satisfactory. One of the features of the Pujahs is the nautches given by wealthy members of the Hindu community. As in previous years nautches were held on three days, commencing from Sunday. Yesterday was specially set apart for Europeans, a large number of whom accepted the invitations extended to them. Probably the best attended entertainment was that held last night at the residence of Raja Benoy Krishna, where a large gathering of ladies and gentlemen were present and witnessed the well-known drama "Pranay Pariksha" by the Star Theatre Company. Several other nautches also took place in other parts of the town and were well attended.

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[This Index includes important events during the celebration of Durga Puja in the pre-and post-Independence era related to the study of this book. Page references to the related events are given for special attention of the reader.]

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